



DON'T WORRY BE HEALTHY

A Buddhist Guide for Health & Healing

VOLUME 2

Compiled by

Dr. PHANG CHENG KAR



DON'T WORRY BE HEALTHY

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Book cover:

"BUDDHA CARES FOR THE SICK"

(Mural at Da Lin Tzu Chi Hospital)

Painted by Li Chien-yi

Courtesy of Tzu Chi Foundation

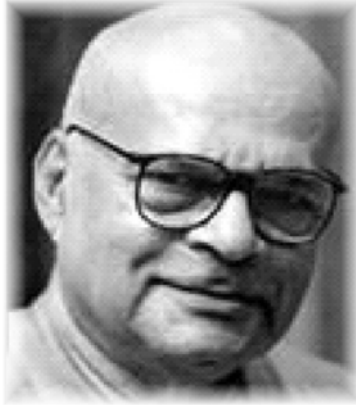
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Dr. PHANG CHENG KAR (MD)

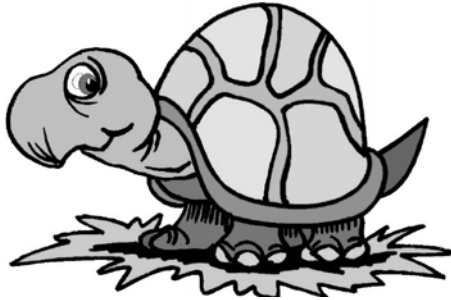
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This book is dedicated to
Venerable Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda Maha
Nayaka Thero on his 86th birthday
on March 18, 2005

May he continue to be
well, happy, healthy
and live long to propagate
the sublime Dharma for the
happiness of all sentient beings!

CAUTION!



The subject matter covered in this book is general and not prescriptive in nature.

It should NOT be used as substitute to actual medical care and consultation for specific illness. Early diagnosis, regular follow-ups with physician, compliance with treatment, regular exercise, well balanced diet, good social support and positive mental attitude are still the gold standards in healthcare. This book only serves to spiritually augment whatever medical treatment you are undergoing.



FOREWORD



Dr. Phang Cheng Kar's "Don't Worry, Be Healthy - A Buddhist Guide for Health & Healing" is an excellent combination of medical and dhamma knowledge in seeking a life of wellness & happiness. The good doctor has used his professional knowledge and experience as a medical doctor together with his understanding of the Buddha Dhamma to write a guide for health and healing.

Mind Body medicine is becoming an important field of medical study in the modern world although the Buddha over 2,500 years ago had taught the power of the mind over our life. Western medicine has been treating man's diseases by concentrating on the body, treating the effect but not the cause. Thus depending on continuous use of drugs to treat one's illness. This might be good for the pharmaceutical business but not for the patients who might have to suffer the side effects of the long term use of these drugs.

It is much better to treat the cause itself thus relieving one self on the dependence of drugs. The best medicine is to practice mental cultivation and appropriate use of drugs in treating one's illnesses. This guide will be helpful in preventing and even

healing many common medical problems faced by modern man like pain, addiction, stress, anxiety and depression. There are also important topics on healthy eating, caring for the sick, past life regression therapy and how to face death.

Congratulations to Dr. Phang Cheng Kar for this excellent contribution towards the field of Buddhist Education by focusing on achieving wellness through Buddhist Practice.

Thanks to the sponsors who have supported the printing of this book.

May You All Be Well & Happy.

Ven. B. Saranankara Thero,
Chief High Priest,
Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple,
Sentul, Kuala Lumpur.

31st March 2005



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



I would like to state on record here that in the compilation of this book, I have taken some graphics, portion of writing, quotations, stories and similes from many sources. I have tried my very best to seek permission and acknowledge the sources. If due acknowledgement has not been made, I sincerely regret the omission and apologise for the oversight. I hope this acknowledgement would serve as my sincere request for permission, in order that many will benefit from the compilation of this book that will be printed for free distribution.

I would like to especially thank the following people who have contributed to this book in various ways:

- SIS. SOW YENG
- BRO. ENG HOE
- SIS. JULIE TAN
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 - SIS. KIA GUT
- DR. ONG TIEN KWAN
- BRO. ROBERT YAP

&

- ALL PATIENTS & BUDDHIST FRIENDS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO MY EXPERIENCE AS A HOLISTIC PSYCHOSPIRITUAL MEDICAL DOCTOR



PREFACE



Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhasa

As I'm writing this, I have just come back from Ipoh General Hospital ICU visiting my sister-in-law, a young and active Buddhist Tzu Chi member. She is four months pregnant and has just gone through a high risk emergency operation for her newly diagnosed brain tumour. In the visit, I'm delighted to see that many of the principles found in this book are put into action by her Buddhist friends and family members to support her recovery.

My interest in this area of Buddhist principles for health and healing started when I was given the opportunity to present a paper entitled, "Total Health Through Dharma" at the year 2000 Global Conference in Buddhism held in Singapore. Since then, I have been accumulating literature and experience pertaining to this topic. Whatever has been compiled into this book is no way exhaustive but it's good enough for a start, as a guide for anyone who is ignorant on what can be done from a Buddhist perspective during sickness.

When I wrote my first book, "Don't Worry, Be Happy - A medical student's motivation and inspirational

guide", I was actually preparing myself ahead for my career as a medical doctor. As for this second book, I'm also preparing myself but for a greater challenge in life - SICKNESS. I hope I'm able to live and grow from my sickness when it strikes. May you all find joy in reading this book and be blessed with good health, happiness and longevity.

Dr. Phang Cheng Kar (MD)

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20th February, 2005

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DONATION

DEDICATION OF MERITS



Thus have I understood the Buddha's
principle for health and healing that I would
like to share with all of you...

BOUNDLESS LOVE



JUST AS A MOTHER WOULD PROTECT
HER ONLY CHILD WITH HER LIFE,
EVEN SO LET ONE CULTIVATE A
BOUNDLESS LOVING-KINDNESS
TOWARDS ALL BEINGS

-Metta Sutta-

BENEFITS OF METTA (LOVING-KINDNESS)

- ♥ He sleeps easily
- ♥ He wakes up fresh like a flower opening
 - ♥ He has pleasant dreams
- ♥ He is loved by celestial beings and animals
 - ♥ He is dear to human beings
 - ♥ He is protected by spirits
- ♥ He is not harmed by external dangers like poison and weapons
- ♥ His mind is easily concentrated and serene
 - ♥ His face is radiant
 - ♥ He dies peacefully
- ♥ He will be reborn in happy realms

BESIDES BEING POISON TO THE MIND, ANGER & HATRED ARE ALSO A DANGER TO OUR PHYSICAL HEALTH. MEDICAL SCIENCE HAS CONFIRMED THAT ANGER AND OTHER UNHEALTHY EMOTIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO BODILY DISEASE.



-Visuddhacara-

METTA BHAVANA

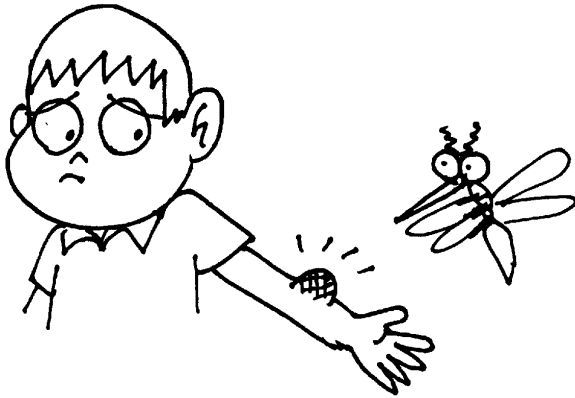
(Loving-kindness Meditation)

Metta bhavana or loving-kindness meditation is a mental exercise to develop unconditional love in us. In Buddhism, the mind is chief and everything is mind made. Therefore, to cultivate loving-kindness, it has to begin with the mind. Here are the basic principles in Metta meditation that I follow.



1. Find a quiet environment e.g. alone in your room.
2. Find a comfortable position e.g. cross legged.
3. Recollect the GOODNESS in your life e.g. various meritorious deeds you have performed, things you are grateful for, your talents etc.
4. Radiate good wishes to yourself e.g.

May I be free from harm and danger
May I be free from mental suffering
May I be free from physical suffering
May I take good care of myself happily



May you be well and happy!

5. Recall to your mind the various groups of beings in life e.g. spouse, parents, siblings, relatives, neighbours, friends, teachers, colleagues, animals, celestial beings etc.
6. Radiate general good wishes to them as well, just like in no 4.
7. Radiate specific good wishes to them e.g.

*May my wife be a good and successful teacher
May my father's diabetes be under control
May my mother's cancer never relapse
May my sister do well in her exam*

8. Just do it - don't criticise yourself for not doing it good enough (be kind to yourself).
- be consistent!
 - never give up!

There are a lot of Buddhist centres with devotees practising Metta meditation. It would be good if you can join them to learn about the practice. Those planning to do intensive Metta meditation, should always do it with guidance from an experience meditation master.

HOLDING ON TO ANGER IS LIKE
GRASPING A HOT COAL WITH THE INTENTION
OF THROWING IT AT SOMEONE ELSE -
YOU ARE THE ONE WHO GETS BURNED!

-Buddha-

METTA WORKOUT FOR SOCIAL HEALTH

There are many ways to cultivate metta. Here are a few techniques that we can use in our daily interpersonal lives.



1. **REMEMBER THE GOODNESS WITHIN.** Always try to recollect our goodness instead of constantly condemning ourselves for our imperfections. Love ourselves to love others!
2. **MAY YOU BE WELL AND HAPPY.** Always say this lovely prayer to anyone we meet to suffuse them with loving thoughts.
3. **TOUCH GOOD SEEDS** in others. Always try to look for good points in others instead of constantly complaining about their bad points.
4. **THE DOOR OF MY HEART IS ALWAYS OPEN.** Always ask for forgiveness, forgive others and forgive ourselves.

5. **I AM HUMAN, YOU ARE ALSO HUMAN.**
Always reflect that all of us don't want to suffer and want to be happy. This would motivate us to treat everyone kindly.

DARKNESS CANNOT BE DISPELLED
BY DARKNESS BUT BY LIGHT
HATRED CANNOT BE OVERCOME
BY HATRED BUT BY LOVING-KINDNESS

-Buddha-

TENDER LOVING CARE FOR SPEEDY RECOVERY

A study was done at the Massachusetts General Hospital, USA. The aim of the study was to show how a doctor's caring attitude (loving-kindness and compassion) could alter the expectation of a treatment and recovery rate from surgery. The patients were divided into 2 groups.

Before the operation, an anaesthetist talked to each person in the first group on normal routine stuff. The anaesthetist, however, devoted a few extra minutes and was extra nice to those in the second group. He tried to establish a personal bond and listened to the patients' worries, answered their questions, and gave them assurance and encouragement.

It was discovered that the patients in the second group required less pain killer, recovered faster from the operation, and was discharged earlier from hospital as compared to the first group. So, next time when we visit our friends or relatives in hospital, we should suffuse them with a mega dose of Metta for a speedy recovery.



4 LOVING THOUGHTS FOR PRESCRIPTION



"May you be well"
LOVING-KINDNESS (Metta)



"Hope you will get well soon"
COMPASSION (Karuna)



"Great to see you well again"
APPRECIATIVE JOY (Mudita)



"Hmmm....I see"
EQUANIMITY (Upekkha)

These interesting teachings found on a Buddhist T-Shirt based on the 4 Brahmaviharas (sublime states) captured my attention instantly when I first saw them. I'm wearing it now and always try to put them into practice whenever I see my patients. I have a MD (Doctor of Medicine) qualification just like many other doctors. But, I have another personal interpretation to this MD. Besides been a medical doctor, I'm also trying to play the role of a medical deva (deity). As a medical deva, I expect myself to give spiritual counselling as well and bless my patients with good wishes e.g. "May you be well", "Hope you get well soon" and "Great to see you well again" as written on the T-Shirt.



I TEACH!

I PREACH!

I HEAL!

As I work in a psychiatric department, I encounter a lot of drug addicts, criminals and sometimes homosexuals. It is very easy to develop aversion towards these people as they are often manipulative and rejected by the society. As a medical deva, the Buddha advises me to treat them with equanimity

(Hmmm...I see). He always remind me to shower compassion on them and to help them as much as I can, just like what I do to other patients. He also frequently consoles me that it's natural that I won't be able to help all patients. He shares with me humbly that He Himself despite been the greatest physician is unable to enlighten everyone all the time. Of course that qualifies Him as the Buddha, the wisest physician of all.

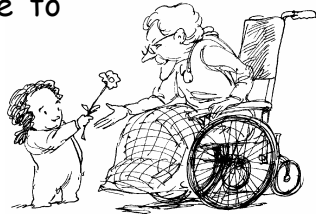
WHEN I MEET A MAN
I NEVER THINK OF HIS RACE,
COLOUR AND RELIGION BUT FEEL THAT
I HAVE MET ANOTHER MEMBER
OF MY HUMAN FAMILY

-Dalai Lama-

CARING FOR HEALTH & LONGEVITY

HAPPINESS IS A PERFUME YOU CANNOT
POUR ON OTHERS WITHOUT GETTING
A FEW DROPS ON YOURSELF

Researchers once gave a plant to every resident of a nursing home. Half of these elderly people were told that the plants were theirs to care for. They had to pay close attention to their plants' needs for water and sunlight, and should respond carefully to those needs. The other half of the residents were told that the plants were theirs to enjoy but they did not have to take any responsibility for them. The nursing staff would care for the plants. At the end of the year, the researchers compared the two groups of elders. It was found that the residents who had been asked to care for their plants were living considerably longer than the norm, were much healthier, and were more oriented and connected to their world. The other residents, those who had plants but did not have to stay responsive to them, simply reflected the norms for people of their age in longevity, health, alertness, and engagement with the world.



TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR BODY



Someone once approached Ajahn Lee with a problem. Some of his friends had said to him, "If the body is NON-SELF, why can't we hit you?" Ajahn Lee advised him to answer them by saying:

LOOK! THIS BODY IS NOT MINE,
I HAVE BORROWED IT,
SO I HAVE TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF IT,
I CAN'T LET ANYONE ELSE MISTREAT IT.

So, we should be grateful to our body and take good care of it to be strong and healthy.

LOVE YOURSELF TO LOVE OTHERS

It was the beginning of 2005 and I was making spiritual aspiration to do more good to benefit others. "When we plant an aspiration, the opportunity will automatically come!" This saying is true, and not for long, I received an email from a Buddhist friend admitted to ICU who required 50 units of blood replacement. I quickly grabbed the opportunity to help, since the last time I donated my blood was quite some time ago.



So, without delay, I happily went to the hospital's blood donation unit and said that I would like to donate my blood for my friend. The nurse then pricked the tip of my left middle finger to get a sample of my blood for testing. I was not anxious at all as I have gone through that many times. But, to my surprise, my drop of blood stubbornly refused to sink in the blue coloured solution, indicating that my haemoglobin level was low. Furthermore, my blood pressure was only 90/50 mm Hg (low). Of course I was then kindly told that I was not fit enough to

donate my blood and to have adequate rest at home.

Come to think about it, I really wasn't been very kind to myself around that time; not sleeping, eating and resting enough. Well, I couldn't do *dana* on that day but at least I learned an important lesson, "I MUST TAKE GOOD CARE OF MY HEALTH BEFORE I CAN SHARE IT WITH OTHERS".

IN ALL THE WORLD,
WE SHOULD LOVE OURSELVES THE MOST.
AND IT'S BECAUSE OF THAT,
WE SHOULD NEITHER HARM OURSELVES
NOR CAUSE HARM TO OTHERS.

-Buddha-

'MAKE LOVE' WITH YOUR BODY

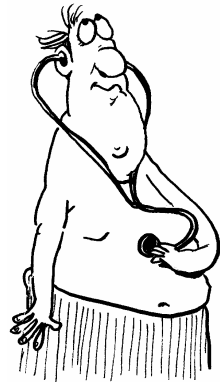
One of the ways to promote a healthy body is by radiating gratitude and loving-kindness to it. This will revitalise the body and enhance its functional capacity. It's a wonderful relaxation practice especially after a long and tired day. It's also very good for people with insomnia (difficulty in sleeping). The following is the guide for this beautiful exercise.

1. Find a quiet environment e.g. alone in your room.

2. Find a comfortable position e.g. lying on a couch.

3. Breathe in and out naturally and mindfully.

4. As you breathe in, bring awareness to your eyes and express gratitude to it e.g. "Dear Eyes, thank you very much for giving me the chance to watch the beautiful sunset this evening".



5. As you breathe out, send Metta to your eyes with a smile e.g. "Dear Eyes, I know you are tired. Take a good rest and may you be well and happy". Don't forget to put on a smile.

6. Repeat no. 4 and 5 for different parts and organs of the body, from the top of the head to the bottom of the toes e.g. brain, ears, nose, mouth, heart, lungs, liver, gallbladder, spleen, stomach, intestines, kidney, bladder, genital, hands, legs etc.

7. If any part of the body is sick or painful, there is even more need to express gratitude and send Metta to it e.g. "Dear Nose, thank you so much that you are just runny and not cancerous. May you be well, happy and have a speedy recovery".

Even if we have a part of the body that is cancerous, there is greater chance of healing if we 'make love' with it rather than to respond angrily to it. This is the healing power of compassion.

As I'm typing this page, my back is aching as I have been sitting for hours. So, "My dear Back, thank you so much for contributing to this book. Take a good rest and may you be well and happy".

'SOFT HEART' FOR SPIRITUAL SICKNESS

Once, some 500 monks who went into the jungle to practise meditation were disturbed and frightened by certain spirits, whereupon they returned and reported the matter to the Buddha. The Buddha then advised the monks to go back to the same place but armed with the sword of Metta (Loving-kindness) for their protection. The Buddha then delivered the Metta Sutta to teach them how to practise this loving kindness. The monks returned to the jungle and radiated their loving-kindness to those spirits and thereafter they continued with their meditation without any hindrance.

These tree spirits who had earlier haunted the monks, later repented, paid respect to the monks and even protected them.



Many of us believe that evil spirits can cause us to fall sick. So, we often resort to mediums for treatment that might not be effective and could be costly. A better way would be chanting the Metta Sutta and radiating loving-kindness to manage such kind of 'spiritual sickness'.

THE ANGER EATING DEMON

-Nyanaponika Thera-

Once there lived a demon who had a peculiar diet. He fed on the anger of others. And as his feeding ground was the human world, there was no lack of food for him. He found it quite easy to provoke a family quarrel, or national and racial hatred. Even to stir up a war was not very difficult for him. And whenever he succeeded in causing a war, he could properly gorge himself without much further effort; because once a war starts, hate multiplies by its own momentum and affects even normally friendly people. So the demon's food supply became so rich that he sometimes had to restrain himself from over-eating, being content with nibbling just a small piece of resentment found close-by.



But as it often happens with successful people, he became rather overbearing and one day when feeling bored he thought: "Shouldn't I try it with the gods?" On reflection he chose the Heaven of the Thirty-three Deities, ruled by Sakka, Lord of Gods. He knew

that only a few of these gods had entirely eliminated the fetters of ill-will and aversion, though they were far above petty and selfish quarrels. So by magic power he transferred himself to that heavenly realm and was lucky enough to come at a time when Sakka the Divine King was absent. There was none in the large audience hall and without much ado the demon seated himself on Sakka's empty throne, waiting quietly for things to happen, which he hoped would bring him a good feed. Soon some of the gods came to the hall and first they could hardly believe their own divine eyes when they saw that ugly demon sitting on the throne, squat and grinning. Having recovered from their shock, they started to shout and lament: "Oh you ugly demon, how can you dare to sit on the throne of our Lord? What utter cheekiness! What a crime! you should be thrown headlong into the hell and straight into a boiling cauldron! You should be quartered alive! Begone! Begone!"

But while the gods were growing more and more angry, the demon was quite pleased because from moment to moment he grew in size, in strength and in power. The anger he absorbed into his system started to ooze from his body as a smoky red-glowing mist. This evil aura kept the gods at a distance and their radiance was dimmed.

Suddenly a bright glow appeared at the other end of the hall and it grew into a dazzling light from which Sakka emerged, the King of Gods. He who had firmly entered the undeflectible Stream that leads Nibbana-wards, was unshaken by what he saw. The smoke-screen created by the gods' anger parted when he slowly and politely approached the usurper of his throne. "Welcome, friend! Please remain seated. I can take another chair. May I offer you the drink of hospitality? Our Amrita is not bad this year. Or do you prefer a stronger brew, the vedic Soma?" While Sakka spoke these friendly words, the demon rapidly shrank to a diminutive size and finally disappeared, trailing behind a whiff of malodorous smoke that likewise soon dissolved.

**WELCOME, WEL-GO
LET GO, LET'S GROW**



The above story has relevance to our illness e.g. cancer or any other pathological growth in the body. They also behave like anger eating demons. The more we get angry and wish to drive them away, the worse they would be. The more we WELCOME them with compassion and LET GO, they will disappear and let go of us. Letting go here doesn't mean we don't

seek treatment for our illness. It only means we try our best and surrender the rest to nature. This kind of compassionate and letting go attitude is of utmost importance if we want to facilitate healing in any illness.

HOW MANY EVIL MEN COULD I KILL?
THEIR NUMBER IS BOUNDLESS AS THE SKY.
BUT IF THE THOUGHT OF ANGER IS KILLED,
ALL ENEMIES ARE KILLED!

-Shantideva-

Chapter 7



CARING FOR THE SICK

HE WHO SERVES THE SICK SERVES THE BUDDHA

The Buddha made the above famous statement when he discovered a monk lying in his soiled robes, desperately ill with an acute attack of dysentery. With the help of Ananda, the Buddha washed and cleaned the sick monk in warm water. On this occasion, he reminded the monks that they have neither parents nor relatives to look after them. So, they must look after one another. If the teacher is ill, it is the



HOW ARE YOU,
LITTLE BUDDHA?

duty of the pupil to look after him. If the pupil is ill, it is the teacher's duty to look after the sick pupil. If a teacher or a pupil is not available, it is the responsibility of the community to look after the sick.

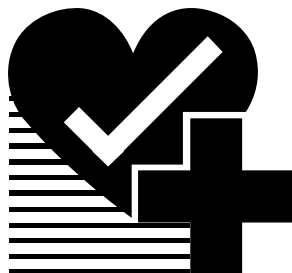
I reflect on the above statement everyday whenever I see my patients. I will remind myself to serve every one of them with great care as though as I'm serving the Buddha.

REMEMBER: A PATIENT IS A HUMAN BEING!

By Lai Chi-wan,
M.D., Associate Dean of Tzu Chi College of Medicine
and Humanities and Vice Superintendent of Tzu Chi
General Hospital.

Translated by Low Siew Kiang, Wong Jong Yin,
Chui Suen Yee (Singapore), and Wu
Hsiao-ting (Taiwan)

*As medical professionals,
we should always bear in mind
that the patients who receive
care from us are human beings.
Only by adopting a humanistic approach to our
patients can we become really successful medical
workers.*



The history of medicine can be traced far back to ancient times. In that long history, many of the great physicians who were renowned for their professional skills were also intellectuals. William Osler, who had a great influence upon the teaching and practice of medicine in the United States in the 1900s, once said that a good doctor must be well-read.

After Abraham Flexner published a report in 1910 denouncing the unsystematic training then offered in medical schools in the United States and Canada and emphasizing the importance of science in medical education, the attention of American educators became focused on how to train scientifically excellent and technically competent physicians. At the same time, however, humanities courses that could help reinforce humanistic values in medicine were largely ignored in medical training.

It was not until the 1970s that attention was again brought to the importance of a humanistic education in the cultivation of doctors. It was discovered that if the human element were ignored in the healing process, patients would suffer more serious physical and mental pain.

Caring for the patient, not just curing the disease

What do we mean by a humanistic education? It should include philosophy, literature, art, history, logic, anthropology, psychology, ethics and interpersonal relationships.

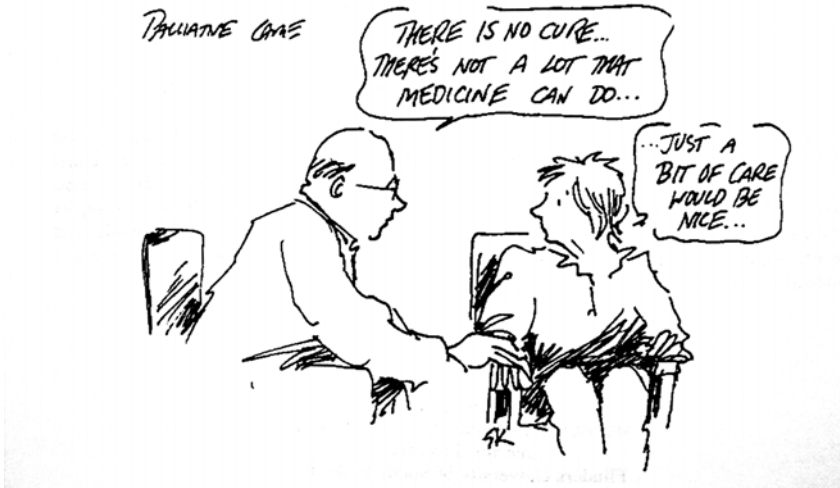
Medical professionals may wonder what all this learning has to do with the practice of medicine. Such

an education will directly or indirectly help strengthen a doctor's professional ethics, power of reasoning, logical and analytical ability, power of observation, and the ability to select and use words with precision, all of which will help better the quality of his communication skills and medical care.

How, then, do we expect a humanistic education to contribute towards improving the quality of medical care?

First, we hope that a doctor who has received a humanistic education will do more than just cure diseases. He or she will also be a caring person who is devoted to both the physical and spiritual well-being of the patient.

A physician whose full attention is centered on curing a disease is like a mere artisan, instead of a real artist. No matter how technically well-trained the doctor is, this lack of a background in the humanities prevents him from showing true compassion to patients. Sometimes the doctor even looks at them as mere guinea pigs for his medical skills, or as tools to corroborate scientific theories. We hope we can dedicate ourselves to training doctors whose focus is on the patient, not just on the disease.



Second, we hope the doctor can put into practice the "total care" concept--that is, the doctor's concern should not only be about how to alleviate a patient's physical suffering, but also how the patient's illness affects the quality of life for him and his family.

Dr. Cicely Saunders, founder of the world-renowned St. Christopher's Hospice in London, is celebrated for practicing this "total care" concept in her treatment of patients. After working in the nursing field for some time, she accidentally hurt her back while moving a patient one day. The injury prevented her from carrying out a nurse's duties, so she took up another course of study, social work, hoping to serve patients in another way.

After finishing those courses, Dr. Saunders dedicated herself to caring for terminally ill patients. During her service, she found that this group of patients was seriously neglected by the medical system. When she argued with doctors for their benefit, the doctors always said, "You are only a social worker, what do you know about medical care?" Therefore, in her thirties, she made up her mind to qualify as a physician. She subsequently completed her medical studies and made the care of the dying her lifelong pursuit.

I have learned a lot from the autobiography of Dr. Saunders, including the "total care" concept. "Many doctors tend to turn away from patients who are terminally ill, thinking that since their diseases are incurable, there is nothing further they can do," she said. "I think this is wrong. Actually, we can still do a lot for the dying." She found that cancer patients often had to endure a lot of pain in the last stage of their life, so she developed a method of care known as "total pain control." "If patients feel pain every six hours, why don't we give them injections every five hours?"

Dr. Saunders attended to each patient's needs with meticulous care. She found out the dosages needed by

each one of them and administered drugs on schedules tailored to each patient's needs. Her method saved dying patients from having to suffer acute pain during the last few months of their lives. Moreover, careful administration of medicine dosage also prevented patients from becoming comatose.

Dr. Saunders extended her love and care of the patients to their families. Knowing what a great burden it was to take care of a terminally ill person and how tiring it was on the families, she developed a home-care program in which hospice staff provided medical care to patients in their own homes. This program enabled families to have more time at their disposal, so that they could get more rest or use the time to take care of other business. Dr. Saunders did far more than a doctor was usually expected to do, but her method ensured the most humane care for patients.

Communicate with patients

Third, we hope the doctor will learn how to communicate effectively with patients and their families. A doctor has the duty to explain to a patient the nature of his illness, to what degree the patient can recover from it, and what problems may confront

his or her family members during and after the healing process.

I will cite my own experience as an example here. My specialty is neurology, and I concentrate my efforts especially on the disease of epilepsy. There is no predicting when an epileptic seizure might occur. When it does, the patient loses consciousness and his entire body jerks convulsively. There has been a great deal of misunderstanding about this disease. A long time ago, people thought that the patient was possessed by an evil spirit.

As medical professionals, we have the responsibility to correct misconceptions regarding different diseases. An old maxim says, "A stitch in time saves nine." I don't think I can say it any better. I have a patient who is afflicted with subarachnoid hemorrhage. This disease often happens when a patient is exerting strength or is in a state of excitement. This patient of mine was attacked by a severe headache while having sexual relations with his wife, and he immediately fell into a coma. Luckily, he recovered after surgery and was released from the hospital a few weeks later.

One day, he came to the hospital for his regular checkup and told me that his wife had been saved

from an attempted suicide. "Why did she try to kill herself?" I asked. "Because my parents could not forgive her." His parents thought that since the attack happened while he was making love to his wife, she must have caused it.

While treating patients, we often fail to keep them and their families fully informed and counseled about what might have precipitated or brought about the disease. In the above story, for example, his parents were wrong in laying the blame on their daughter-in-law. Actually, the cause of his disease was an aneurysm in his brain.

Therefore, we doctors have the duty to educate patients and their families and to explain to them the diagnosis of their diseases and the treatment process. What's more important, we should also try to enrich the public's understanding of health and medical matters.

If doctors care for patients, patients will care for doctors

When doing my rounds in the wards, I often have to remind my students that whenever they talk about a patient, they should always refer to him by name, not as just a case. This is a very important idea. And

herein lies the importance of an education that promotes humanism: it helps raise doctors' awareness of "patients as human beings" in medical practice.

Eric Cassell, author of the book *The Place of the Humanities in Medicine*, holds that literature and other branches of the humanities should have their place in medical training. Many people have scorned his idea, saying, "The humanities focus on the abstract--only surgery and medicine are real sciences."

Cassell defended himself by saying: "While medical science deals solely with body parts, doctors who take care of patients do not have this luxury--they must work with people. Because of this, they are always faced with the feelings of their patients--the fears, desires, concerns, expectations, hopes, fantasies and meanings that patients bring or attach to interactions with physicians--that always exist and that always influence their medical care."

In other words, when you practice medicine, you are interacting with people, not diseases. Since the first priority is the patients who receive care from you, if you lack a background in the humanities, you would be incompetent to handle problems which might arise in the interaction between you and your patients.

Very early one morning five years ago, while I was on my way to work, my cellular phone rang. The call was from a family member of one of my patients. He told me that his wife had fallen into a coma in her sleep the night before. He was really anxious to know what had caused the coma, so he hoped that I could phone the hospital and ask about the condition of his wife and the chances of her survival.

I had been taking care of this particular patient for almost ten years. She suffered from epilepsy, but she had not had a seizure in several months after trying a new medication I prescribed for her. Therefore, I was also anxious to know what had happened to her. However, I had a tight schedule that day: in the morning I had an appointment for a health checkup for myself, and then I had to work in outpatient service. So I told him if I could get the information immediately, I would call him back soon; if not, he would have to wait until about two o'clock that afternoon.

Fortunately, I was able to reach a doctor working in the intensive care unit. He told me that my patient was brain-dead, and that now her life was being sustained by an artificial respirator. I called her husband back. After breaking the news to him, I tried to comfort him by saying, "We all have to die one

day." He and his wife had been married for almost forty years, and they were deeply in love with each other. He began to cry on the other end of the line, but all of a sudden he asked me, "I am not the type who likes to pry into other people's business, but I just heard you mention that you are going to have a health checkup. Are you feeling unwell?"

I replied that my doctor suggested I get a checkup and that I was indeed a little worried about my own health. I was really surprised that he should think of me when he was undergoing the pain of losing his wife. "Doctor, everyone in my family will pray for you. I hope everything is fine with you." When I hung up the phone, tears rushed to my eyes and my blurred vision prevented me from driving any further.

It never occurred to me that a patient would care for a doctor as the doctor cares for him. But at that moment I came to realize that doctors and patients can actually share the same love for each other.

We health care professionals are usually held in high esteem, but we can't take this for granted. We should all work hard to make ourselves worthy of that esteem.

I hope that you will cultivate your interest in the humanities, and always remember the importance of the role of the human spirit in the treatment process. Only by adopting a humanistic approach to your patients can you make yourself a really successful medical worker.



THE MOST IMPORTANT
VITAMIN THAT THE
SICK PEOPLE NEED IS
VITAMIN - C
COMPASSION

THREE TYPES OF PATIENTS

In the Gilana Sutta, the Buddha says that they are three types of patients:

1st type : Will NOT recover from sickness regardless of whether there is proper food, medicine or nursing.

2nd type : Will SURE recover from sickness regardless of whether there is proper food, medicine or nursing.

3rd type : Will ONLY recover from sickness if there is proper food, medicine or nursing.



WHICH TYPE OF PATIENT ARE YOU?

It is because of the third type of patient that we should make effort to attend to the sick. However, the first type of people should

be attended as well with palliative care although their sickness is incurable. This is to ensure that they have good quality of life and die peacefully with good rebirth. Otherwise, they will die in pain and anger and that wouldn't be conducive for a good rebirth.

The second type of patient should also be attended as it will speed up the recovery process and reduce suffering. In summary, ALL patients should be attended with wisdom and compassion irrespective of their prognosis. Similarly, all should be introduced to the Dharma as well.

COMPASSION IS AN
OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE ORDER
TO RELIEVE THE SUFFERING
OF MANKIND

-Dr. Phang Cheng Kar-



VOLUNTARY WORK IS GOOD FOR HEALTH

Join me to become a
VOLUNTEER!

In a study in United States, it was noted that people who helped others reported the following:

- They consistently reported better health.
- Their health markedly improved when they began volunteer work.
- They reported long term calmness and relaxation.
- 95% of them said helping others gave a physically good feeling. Nine out of ten experienced physical sensations of sudden warmth, increased energy and a sense of euphoria.

THE BEST WAY TO FIND YOURSELF
IS TO LOSE YOURSELF IN THE
SERVICE OF OTHERS

-Mahatma Gandhi-

There are several reasons why when we do voluntary work we become physically, mentally and socially healthier:

1. In the process of serving others, we discover that other people's problem can be greater and ours is relatively insignificant.
2. When we are able to help others in voluntary work, we feel useful and a sense of purpose. This will boost our self-esteem.
3. Social interaction in voluntary work enables us to ventilate our problems and keep us emotionally healthier.
4. Voluntary work frequently involves physical action which is good for physical fitness.
5. Doing voluntary work is a meritorious action. The karmic effect is automatically health and happiness.

your medication dosage without prior discussion with your doctor.

3. He should take prescribed medicine without fuss e.g. Don't default follow-ups and always be compliant with medications as prescribed by your doctor.

4. He should honestly disclose his ailments to his doctor e.g. Don't lie to your doctor about your smoking, alcoholic or drug abuse habit, as it will influence your doctor's diagnosis and management of your sickness.

5. He should bear physical pain patiently even when it is acute and excruciating e.g. Don't curse the doctor who is diligently trying his best to relieve your pain. Pain is suffering enough. Don't add on bad karma that will eventually result in even more pain.

I will certainly have a much easier time at work if all patients listen to the Buddha's advice on how to be a good patient. I will then need LESS PATIENCE WITH MY PATIENTS.

VISITING THE SICK

-Ajahn Brahmavamso-

How many of us say, "How are you feeling today?" when visiting a loved one in hospital?

For a start, what a stupid thing to say! Of course they're feeling rotten, otherwise they wouldn't be in hospital, would they? Furthermore, the common greeting puts the patient in profound psychological stress. They feel it would be an act of rudeness to upset their visitors by telling the truth that they feel terrible. How can they disappoint someone who has taken the time and trouble to come and visit them in hospital by honestly replying that they feel awful, as

"OH NO - THE PREACHER'S
HERE - I MUST BE WORSE
OFF THAN I THOUGHT!!"



drained as teabag? So instead, they may feel compelled to lie, saying, "I think I feel a little better today", meanwhile feeling guilty that they aren't doing enough to get better. Unfortunately, too many hospital visitors make the patients feel more ill!

An Australian nun of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition was dying of cancer in a hospice in Perth. I had known her for several years and would visit her often. One day she phoned me at my monastery, requesting me to visit her that very day as she felt her time was close. So I dropped what I was doing and immediately got someone to drive me the seventy kilometres to the hospice in Perth. When I checked in at the hospice reception, an authoritarian nurse told me that the Tibetan Buddhist nun had given instructions that no one was to visit her.

"But I have come from so far especially to see her," I gently said.

"I'm sorry." barked the nurse, "she does not want any visitors and we all must respect that."

"But that cannot be so," I protested. "She phoned me only an hour and a half ago and asked me to come."

The senior nurse glared at me and ordered me to follow her. We stopped in front of the Aussie nun's room where the nurse pointed to the big paper sign taped to the closed door.

"ABSOLUTELY NO VISITORS!"

"See!" said the nurse.

As I examined the notice, I read some more words written in smaller underneath: "...except Ajahn Brahm."

So I went in. When I asked the nun why she had put up the notice with the special exception, she explained that when all her other friends and relations came to visit her, they became so sad and miserable seeing her dying that it made her feel much worse. "It's bad enough dying from cancer", she said, "that it's too much to deal with my visitors' emotional problems as well."



She went on to say that I was the only friend who treated her as a person, not as someone dying: who didn't get upset at seeing her gaunt and wasted, but instead told her jokes and made her laugh. So I told her jokes for the next hour, while she taught me how to help a friend with their death. I learnt from her that when you visit someone in hospital, talk to the person and leave the doctors and nurses to talk to the sickness. She dies less than two days after my visit.



HEALING AND LOVING

-Sister Kia Gut-

A spiritual journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step. My first spiritual encounter started years ago when I attended a three months' meditation course under the guidance of Brother James Ong. Since then, I have gone for quite a number of meditation retreats, attended Dhamma classes, listened to Dhamma talks and even offered my service in the Sunday school. But how far has this spiritual path taken me to? I have always wondered myself with this big question? Has meditation been able to integrate into my life? Has it made me a better person when confronted with the many vicissitudes of the real world? Will I remain peaceful, yet empathetic? So far I have not been tested in difficult and severe conditions. Life has been pretty good to me. But I believe when you are not put to a real test, you may not know your strength and weaknesses.

My first test in life came with a very big bang! I could still remember the date. It was 02/02/2000, only a

few days before the Chinese New Year. My mum had a fall while trying to ease herself. My family admitted her to a private hospital in Malacca. She suffered from a stroke. I spent my New Year in the hospital, looking after her. While I was there, I learnt some techniques of nursing care, which come in handy when I visit the cancer patients later on. But somehow mentally, I was still besieged with all the stress, worries and financial problems. At this crucial moment, I summoned up whatever I have learnt in my meditation and applied mindfulness in doing my daily chores. I also chanted some Pali verses whenever I was left all alone with my mum. Yes, they worked well on me. With a calm and composed mind, I learnt to see life in a better perspective. From thereon, I begin to take thing as it comes. Throughout this period, I was amazed that I did not fall sick. Meditation has indeed proven to have a therapeutic effect on my mental and physical well-being.

Since then, my mum has become semi-paralyzed. She needs constant supervision and nursing care. Despite the many ups and downs, adjusting my life with the sudden change, I try to make it a point to go back to Malacca every weekend to be with her. She stays in a nursing home. While I am there, I try to do all the chores myself, except carrying her up and down the

bed, which I find her too heavy. There are many things I can do. I change her pampers; push her around the housing estate with the wheel chair when the weather is fine; exercise her hands and legs; supervise her feeding; sit with her and even learn to cut her hair. At time I also talk to her, though she understands little. Lately, I apply Reiki- a Japanese Healing technique on her too whenever she coughs. Despite her many disabilities, I find a sense of closeness with her. She is cheerful and easily contented. She teaches me to be more caring, loving, patient and understanding. She is now a "big old baby" to me, while I am her "mother".

Looking after my mum on weekends deprives me from teaching in the Sunday school. However I think it shouldn't stop me from doing some service. After giving much thought and knowing my own temperament, time constraint and other limitations, I decided to spend one of the weekdays, visiting the cancer patients in General Hospital, K.L., which is only a 25 minutes' walk from my office. As Mother Teresa says: "In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love". With this aim in mind (minus the great love as I think I cannot possibly compared myself with Mother Teresa), I began another journey in my spiritual path- a weekly hospital visit to cancer patients.

The visit normally begins on every Wednesday evening. However from time to time, I do make some changes due to some unforeseen circumstances. Prior to it, I will go to one of the supermarkets to buy some packet drinks like barley, chrysanthemum or wheat rice and biscuits. A thousand thanks to the Sariputta group (they are students from the late Uncle Fam's Buddhist adult class) who generously sponsor me with this charitable giving. They have provided me with a more favourable condition to serve and console the sick. Armed with a bag of these goodies, I walk to the hospital. Initially, I went there alone. Later brother Wuan and brother John Ng joined me. Together the three of us will go round, talking, listening, encouraging and consoling the cancer patients. As we walk from bed to bed, we give away a few packets of the goodies each as Dana. From their expression, we know they appreciate those little gifts. From my experience, I find that many people dislike going to hospital, let alone visiting it. It gives them a sense of uneasiness and ill feeling. Most people's mind will be deeply disturbed after seeing the many unpleasant sights of the ill-fated patients, especially those from the cancer wards. Therefore, a volunteer (you can apply to be a GH volunteer by filing up an application form obtained from the GH Welfare Dept.) has to be mentally prepared or otherwise he/she may fall into

depression. Certainly the understanding of the Law of Karma helps to ease his/her feeling of helplessness. I also realize that the Buddhist way of applying mindfulness helps in this situation. By noting the arising of any unpleasant feeling and letting it go, one feels relief and composed thereafter.

Time really flies and without realizing it, it has been 4½ years since I first started the visit. These cancer patients comprise of all races namely Malays, Chinese, Indians and a handful of Orang Asli. I am glad that I can speak Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia, English and a few Chinese dialects. It certainly helps while relating to them, breaking down the language barriers. How and what do I talk to them? Many friends do ask me these questions, as the patients are strangers and seriously ill too. I normally begin with some simple questions like: "

Where do you come from? How long have you been here? Have you taken your meal and so on....?" These are some initial questions to break the ice. I realize that as long as you are sincere, willing to listen and show that you do care for them, they will begin to open up. Moreover, I think as many of them are from outstations and have few visitors, our presence do act as a solace for them to pour out their pain and grievances.

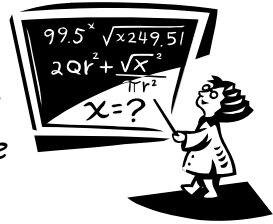
As they relax and feel more at ease, I will give them some pointers on health food, which I gather while making a visit to Madam Dee Sidhu, a Consultant Dietician of the National Cancer Society. Generally, many of these patients while undergoing many sessions of radiation and a few courses of chemotherapy do experience severe bouts of nausea, vomiting, weight loss, loss of appetite, mouth ulcers and hair loss in one way or another. Only a minority experiences no side effects and has good appetite. To these patients, they certainly need lots of loving kindness, compassion, moral support and encouragement from their family and people around them. For those who feel much better, I advise them to take up some light exercises. According to James S. Gordon, M.D. and Sharon Curtin in the book, *Comprehensive Cancer Care* "Every time you practise any of the techniques we describe below- relaxation, meditation, imagery, hypnosis, self-expression and exercise -you gain specific physiological benefits: a decrease in stress hormones and enhanced immunity. Each time you feel the benefit of the technique that you are using, you reinforce your sense of control over your own life and counter whatever feelings of hopelessness and helplessness you may feel."

Seeing the pain and mental anguish some of the patients have to endure while undergoing the treatments, I decided to learn "Reiki". At least I feel that apart from just talking and listening to the patients, I can now help to alleviate their pain slightly, even though it may be for only a few minutes. Yes, every little effort counts. Nonetheless, I always explain to the patients (only confine to the non-Muslims) that this is not a miracle cure. They still have to go through the treatments and take their medication. The only thing I can do is to help to ease their pain a little. After a session of 15 to 30 minutes of Reiki by placing my palms on or above the affected area, many of them do feel a sense of warmth or coolness on the affected area. Generally, they feel much better after the session and some of them even doze off to sleep.

Our hospital visit normally ends around 8.30 p.m. However, sometimes it may even stretch up to 9.00 p.m., depending on the number of patients in the ward. After each visit, I will mentally wish the patients, the donors, my friends and all beings be well and happy. May they recover from their sickness. May they be able to continue to do good and may they take care of themselves always.

My final and most fervent wish will be "May all beings be able to attain to the highest bliss - Nibbana - the cessation of all mental and physical pains, that transcend all sufferings!" Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Sister Kia Gut was my teacher in Brickfields Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS) more than 10 years ago. To be frank, I don't remember much of what she taught me in class. But, her action speaks louder than her words. I always remember her as a very patient and compassionate teacher, just as she is now.



COMPASSION IS THE PASSION
TO COMMUNICATE OUR CARE TO OTHERS
SO THAT THEY CAN CHEER UP

-Tan Ho Soon-

ADVICE FOR WHEN YOU ARE SICK

-Ajahn Brahmavamso-

In my second year as a monk in northeast Thailand, I came down with scrub typhus. The fever was so strong that I was admitted to the monk's ward in the regional hospital at Ubon. In those days, in the mid-1970s, Ubon was a remote backwater of a very poor country. Feeling weak and afflicted, with a drip in my arm, I noticed the male nurse left his station at 6.00 pm. Half an hour later, the replacement nurse had yet to arrive, so I asked the monk in the next bed if we should alert someone in charge that the night nurse hadn't come. I was quickly told that in the monks' ward, there never is a night nurse. If you take a turn for the worse during the night, that's just unlucky karma. It was bad enough being very sick; now I was terrified as well!



For the next four weeks, every morning and afternoon a nurse built like a buffalo would inject my buttocks with antibiotics. This was a poor public hospital in an undeveloped area of a third-world country, so the needles were recycled many more

times that would be allowed even in Bangkok. That strong-armed nurse literally had to stab the needle with considerable force to enter the flesh. Monks were expected to be tough, but my buttocks weren't: they became very sore. I hated that nurse at that time.

I was in pain, I was weak, and I had never felt so miserable in my life. Then, one afternoon, Ajahn Chah came into the monk's ward to visit me. To visit me! I felt so flattered and impressed. I was uplifted. I felt great - until Ajahn Chah opened his mouth. What he said, I later found out, he told many sick monks whom he visited in hospital. He told me,

**YOU'LL EITHER GET BETTER,
OR YOU'LL DIE.**

Then, he went away. My elation was shattered. My joy at the visit vanished. The worst thing was that you couldn't fault Ajahn Chah. What he said was absolute truth. I'll get better or I'll die. Either way, the discomfort of the sickness will not last. Surprisingly, that was very reassuring. As it happened, I got better instead of dying. What a great teacher Ajahn Chah was.



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In a study in United States, it was noted that people who helped others reported the following:

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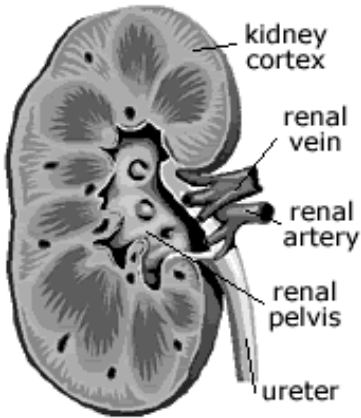
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BOTH PATIENT AND VOLUNTEER

at the Penang Tzu Chi Dialysis Center

-By Ou Chun-ping-

-Translated by Teresa Chang-



"When a doctor at the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center told me that I could receive free dialysis treatment from now on, I was overjoyed. I was speechless and could only keep crying... I felt as if someone had kindly put an umbrella over me as I walked in a downpour."

Touched by the spirit of Tzu Chi volunteers, Momo Ali decided to become a volunteer too. He helps to clean the center and the garden. There are many patients-turned-volunteers like him at the Penang Tzu Chi Dialysis Center.

The burning sun glared down from high above on a typical sultry August day in Malaysia. The air was hot and wet. Even if I stayed still, I sweated.

I followed a volunteer to a suburban residential area

in eastern Penang. A whitewashed building with a blue roof in the far distance caught my attention, because it resembled a Tzu Chi volunteer's blue-sky-and-white-cloud uniform.

I walked into the building's flourishing garden, filled with luxurious flowers and trees. The aroma of osmanthus flowers could somehow cover up the heat and humidity in the air and induced me to inhale the fragrance. I felt refreshed instantly. Had it not been for a big sign, "Buddhist Tzu Chi Dialysis Center," above the entrance, this quiet, beautiful place could easily have been mistaken for a resort center.

As I pushed open the door, I was greeted not by a poignant smell of medicine, but a soothing aroma of lilies placed on a Buddhist altar. On the left of the foyer was a painting, "The Buddha Cares for the Sick." Lee Chi-lang, administrative director of the center, hoped the painting would motivate all staff to serve every dialysis patient with the spirit of "Great mercy even to strangers and great compassion for all." We must show care and concern even for people that we don't know and we must share compassionately in the unhappiness of others.

The center has 12 kidney dialysis machines. Taking two to three shifts, the machines provide service to

54 patients every day. Currently, regular patients include 48 Chinese, 2 Hindus, 3 Malays and 1 Sikh. Most of them are solitary elders, low-income people, or family breadwinners. Tzu Chi extends free services to all people regardless of their race or religion as long as they have been evaluated and deemed eligible for free treatment. The center has no room to accommodate any more patients due to its limited space and equipment; Tzu Chi is therefore subsidizing dialysis treatment for over 100 kidney patients at other hospitals.

"Superintendent Lee"

The time was nine in the morning. Eleven dialysis machines were in full operation, and a backup machine was quietly waiting. Lee Kuo-hsing, 47, was receiving treatment at the rear of the room. A tube inserted in his left arm connected him to the machine. His right hand was busily arranging medical equipment for incoming patients. He worked so deftly that it was hard to tell that he was a patient and not a medical staff member.

"Superintendent Lee, why don't you wait ten minutes until your treatment ends?" asked Nurse Lin Niang-chu. Because patients often experience symptoms of dizziness or hypotension during the dialysis process,

the nurse hoped all patients could fully concentrate on the treatment to prevent those symptoms from happening.

"Don't worry! You're all so busy. Since my right hand is free, I might as well make use of it," Lee said reassuringly. As one of the center's earliest patients, he has been receiving medical care at the center for five years. As time passed, he developed relative-like closeness with the medical staff and other volunteers. Nurses nicknamed him "Superintendent Lee." He comes to the center every day, even on days he does not need treatment, to chat with old friends and serve as a volunteer.

Lee is full of affection for the dialysis machines that have served as his kidneys. He told me that after five years' experience in receiving treatment, he had become an expert in using the dialysis machines. Since he was so familiar with the machines, he often offered his help to new patients.

Lee found out he had kidney atrophy in 1992. For the next four years, he consulted many famous doctors and tried a myriad of treatments. Although he spent all his savings, his health did not improve but deteriorated instead. "I returned to the hospital for another checkup in 1996. When the doctor told me

that I had to rely on dialysis machines for the rest of my life, I was so upset that I almost collapsed."

Since there is no comprehensive health insurance in Malaysia, patients must pay all medical expenses from their own pockets. Dialysis treatment costs 150 Malaysian ringgits (US\$39.47) per use. If a patient receives 13 treatments per month, he must pay close to 2,000 ringgits. The average person earns 2,000 ringgits per month, so when a person becomes afflicted with kidney problems, it is like being sentenced to death.

"I was a blue-collar worker who earned 300 ringgits a week. It was not enough to cover three treatments a week." The every-other-day dialysis treatments took a good part of Lee's time and prevented him from finding a regular job. The crushing pressure from losing his job and paying the astronomical dialysis costs forced him to seek financial help.

In August 1997, the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center opened. Volunteers found out about Lee by reading local newspapers. After visiting his home several times, they evaluated his situation as the sole breadwinner of the family and deemed him qualified for free treatment.

Today Lee's two children have finished their studies and have started working. With his load significantly lessened, Lee uses his free time to help at his wife's food stand and volunteer at the center.

Gardener Ali

I saw a dark-skinned Malay with a hose in his hand, watering flowers in the garden. After a while he began expertly pruning the plants. Lee told me that the man was actually a patient at the dialysis center. He always came to the center an hour before his appointment time in order to take care of the garden and clean the center.

"Tzu Chi has saved my life. Without the free dialyses, I would have kicked the bucket a long time ago!" Momo Ali, 56, hopes to repay Tzu Chi with his expertise in gardening and cleaning. "Doing these jobs also keeps me from getting dizzy when I receive dialysis afterwards."

Ali used to be a janitor at a factory. Three years ago when he was working, his left arm suddenly became turgid, sore, and numb. He eventually fainted. His family sent him to the hospital. The checkup showed that he was afflicted with a kidney illness and that he had to be hospitalized. This bolt from out of the blue

immediately shrouded the moderate-income family in gloom.

Ali fought the illness for a year, but he lost the battle and had to give in to dialysis. "I lost my job when I was fighting the kidney problem. Then I had to pay the crushing dialysis expenses, which dried up my life's savings in less than a month." In order to take care of him, his wife quit her job, thus putting the heavy financial burden on their three children. But with their meager incomes, they still could not make ends meet.

His son's coworker at the factory told him about the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center. Ali contacted the center for help. "When a doctor at the center told me that I could receive free dialysis from now on, I was overjoyed. I was speechless and could only keep crying... I felt as if someone had kindly put an umbrella over me as I walked in a downpour," said Ali. He was very grateful for the gentle care of the medical staff and heartwarming company of volunteers. He said that because of their help, he was given new life and rediscovered happiness.

After three years of dialysis, Ali's health is in relatively good shape. Although a Muslim, he cleans this Buddhist dialysis center and sometimes even the

Buddhist altar. Ali even performs Thai massages on patients troubled by leg cramps during dialysis treatments.

Let patients help each other

Around half of the 54 dialysis recipients have become volunteers at the center. "When I fell to the bottom of the pit," patient Lee Tsai-chu said, "it was Tzu Chi that lifted me out. I want to try my best to help others in my remaining days."

After Tsai-chu fell ill, she thought of ending her life more than once. The complications from dialysis and the overwhelming medical expenses were too much for her and her family. Her suicidal attitude changed after she began to receive free dialysis and the volunteers' warming care. "No words can express my gratitude toward Tzu Chi. Everything the volunteers have done for me comes from the bottom of their hearts, and yet they expect nothing in return." After Tsai-chu came to Tzu Chi, she often listened to tapes of Master Cheng Yen's lectures. One aphorism-- "One's life should be measured not by length, but by the good deeds one has done for the world"--touched a cord in her heart. She prayed that one day she could become a volunteer. So when she learned that Tzu Chi volunteers visited different kidney patients

twice a week, she asked to go with them. She became one of the first group of kidney volunteers who went with Tzu Chi people to send love to kidney patients every Wednesday night and Saturday afternoon.

"I remember that the night before my first visit, I was so excited that I couldn't fall asleep." When a major earthquake hit Taiwan on September 21, 1999, Tsai-chu went with other Tzu Chi people to solicit donations on the street. She said that after she became a volunteer, she learned how to smile and how to care for others. "We once visited a kidney patient who had cancer. Although she knew her time was limited, she still stayed optimistic. If she could do it, then I have all the more reason to follow her example."

We're a family

Many kidney patients have emerged from self-pity and begun actively planning the later parts of their lives. Some have even turned from care recipients to care givers. Their change and growth are the biggest comfort to the staff at the center. Volunteer Lin Tzu-pin has been with the center since its inauguration. Volunteers give their love to the kidney patients, and in return they learn a lot from the

patients' courage and determination in tackling the challenges of life.

Tzu-pin told me that the patients had come together and formed a kidney patients' association. They meet every month and join volunteers to share their experiences with other kidney patients. When their health allows, they even sort recyclable materials with volunteers.

"I often see Tzu Chi volunteers collecting recyclable materials on the streets, rain or shine," said patient Hsieh Fu-jung. "They work so hard not for themselves, but to raise funds for us--the kidney patients. Seeing their unconditional giving, I feel that we kidney patients must use our own strength to help ourselves."

The center has a full-time doctor, nurse specialists, nurse assistants, social workers, and administrative workers to provide professional services to the patients. As for the volunteers, they care for the patients' health and their emotions. "Rather than saying that we give patients advice, we'd rather say we only give them mental support and companionship," Tzu-pin said. "In fact, patients and volunteers are all beneficiaries." Volunteers interact with the patients from the bottom of their hearts in order to make

patients feel that they are coming "home" for dialysis treatments.

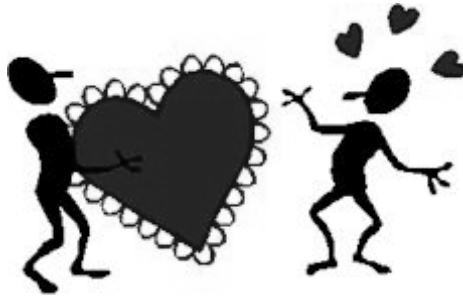
I walked from the foyer to the garden. I looked up just in time to see a scene that deeply moved me. Momo Ali was sweeping the floor. When he saw another patient, Liang Jung-tsai, come in, he, a Malay, immediately opened his arms to welcome Liang, a Chinese. The two patients of different skin colors were locked in a warm embrace, and they greeted each other in their common language--Malay. At that moment I keenly felt that the dialysis center was not only a place that cured illness, but also a place that mended broken hearts.

Tzu Chi volunteers who are in good health might not fully understand the suffering of kidney patients. But patients who have been through or who are currently facing similar destinies can find solace in each other as they share the voices in their hearts.

There is a song that goes like this: "Life is a long road and also a fleeting light; life is as soft as cotton and also as strong as steel..."

Everyone is playing an important role in a show called "Life." Scenes of birth, aging, illness, and death reoccur on this stage again and again. Our lives might

be long or short, perfect or flawed. Yet as long as we put our best foot forward in playing our roles, the show of life will have a perfect ending.



COMPASSION
IS THE UNBEARABLENESS OF
THE SIGHT OF SUFFERING

-Dalai Lama-

DEEP COMPASSIONATE LISTENING

Deep compassionate listening is a very powerful method to heal the sick especially for emotional healing. The following are 8 tips on how to listen therapeutically using Buddhist principles:

1. Invoke the blessings of The Great Compassionate, Thousand-Eyed, Thousand-Handed, Hearer of Cries Bodhisatta (KWAN YIN). This will awaken the super-listening power within us.



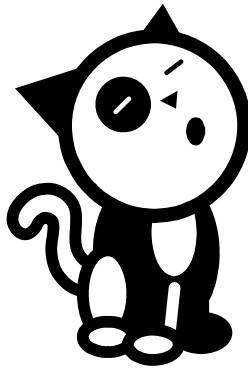
2. Be CALM and RELAX. Mindfully, breathe in and out with a smile. This will help to induce a peaceful state of mind in the person we are listening to and also a peaceful environment.
3. Radiate mega dose of LOVING-KINDNESS to the sick person you are listening to, "May you be well and happy. May you get well soon. May you free from mental/physical suffering".

Visualize beams of loving and healing energy radiating out from your body as of Amitabha Buddha - The Buddha of Infinite Light.

4. Be 100% in the PRESENT MOMENT. Pay undivided attention to the sick person. Remember, the most important time is NOW. The most important person is the one we are listening to NOW and the most important thing to do is to care for him NOW.
5. Be TRUTHFUL. What has been confided to us is private and confidential. Don't go around telling everybody not to tell anybody!
6. Be COMPASSIONATE and empathize with an open heart. Don't be judgemental and punitive! We are not playing God. We are not here to punish people or make people feel guilty. "Eh, you are Buddhist, how can you be doing this? Bad Karma! Sure go to hell!" This wouldn't sound very nice and helpful.
7. Have an OPEN MIND. The mind functions like a parachute. It functions best when it's opened. Allow the person to ventilate at his own pace. Don't interrupt! Don't jump into conclusion!

Don't be trapped by the past! Only then we can have a full understanding of the person.

8. Have a SILENT MIND. Resist the temptation to nag and talk too much e.g. "According to this sutta, you should know that 1. 2. 3" This rarely works. A more effective way is to guide through skilful questioning as what the Buddha did in Rahula Sutta to his son.



A GOOD DOCTOR
CURES SOMETIMES
RELIEVES OFTEN
COMFORTS ALWAYS

DON'T BE A KIND-HEARTED FOOL



KINDNESS, HONESTY AND PATIENCE
WITHOUT COMMON SENSE ARE FERTILE
GROUNDS FOR CUNNING PEOPLE
TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THOSE
WHO POSSESS SUCH QUALITIES.
SOME PEOPLE REGARD THEM AS
KIND-HEARTED FOOLS

-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

BUDDHA HIGHLIGHTS THE VALUE OF TENDING THE SICK

-The Lanka Daily News 25th June 2003-



HE WHO SERVES THE SICK
SERVES THE BUDDHA

Colombo, Sri Lanka - According to an incident recorded in the Cheevarakkhandina of the Vinaya Pitaka (I, 301-2: Bu.J. Mahavagga 2, 734) once, during the Buddha's day, a certain monk fell ill with an attack of dysentery and was lying fallen on his own excrements with none to attend on him.

In his tours of the lodgings with Ananda as attendant, the Buddha came across him and witnessing the helpless condition of the sick monk he inquired as to his illness. Being told that he was ill with dysentery the Buddha next asked him whether there was anyone attending on him.

The sick monk replied in the negative adding further that as he was of no use to the other monks they did not care to tend him. Thereupon the Buddha got Ananda to bring water and he himself sprinkled the water on the invalid while Ananda washed him over. Buddha holding him by the head and Ananda by the feet, they raised him and placed him on a bed.

Having done this the Buddha assembled all the in-dwelling monks and the following dialogue ensued:

Buddha: Monks, is there a sick monk in such and such a dwelling?

Monks: There is, sir.

B: Do you know that he is not well?

M: Yes sir, we know.

B: What is that monk's illness?

M: It is dysentery, sir.

B: Is there anyone tending him?

M: No, sir.

B: Why is that?

M: That monk is of no use to the other monks and therefore the other monks did not care to tend him.

B: Monks, here you have no mother, no father or anyone else who would tend you.

Therefore if you do not attend on one another when needed who else is going to do so? As such, hereby I lay it down as a rule that all monks, when living together, should attend on the sick irrespective of their positions as senior-junior, teacher-pupil etc. If you fail to do so it would be an offence of wrongdoing.

Next he made the celebrated statement highlighting the value of this service that "HE WHO WISHES TO ATTEND ON ME SHOULD DO SO ON THE SICK" - yo mam upatthaheyya so gitaanam upatthaheyya.

In this often-quoted statement it is clearly implied that attending on the sick is as meritorious as attending on the Buddha. The significant fact that emerges is the high premium placed by the Buddha on the ethical value of ministering to the sick. Knowing fully well that devotees are quite eager to wait upon him as a merit-acquiring exercise, the Buddha utilises it to emphasise the high value of tending the sick, of which fact people were generally ignorant.

He also wanted the people to get over this reluctance to tend the sick owing to such reasons as absence of any personal gain or loathsomeness involved in it etc. There was no better way of putting across this lesson to them in the context. He could not have done it better.

There is another interesting incident of the same type wherein the Buddha has set the same example to his disciples.

It is the case of the Poothigatta Tissa Thera's story as recorded in the Dhammapada Commentary (i, 319 ff), wherein this monk had been totally abandoned by the fellow-monks through loathsomeness because his body was covered with sores owing to a dermatital eruption. When the Buddha discovered this he boiled some water and washed him with his own hands and cleansed and dried his garments as well. When Tissa became comfortable he preached to him making him an Arahant.

These two incidents provide ample evidence to the Buddha's exhibition of precept and example in highlighting the value of tending the sick. This service is also recognised as one of the ten acts of merit-acquisition (dasa-punyakriya) under the term veyyaavacca.

The Buddha goes further in dealing with this subject by laying down some basic qualifications necessary for a professional medical man - be it doctor, nurse or attendant, for they all tend the sick (gilaanupatthaka). These are, he or she.....



i. Should be competent in the preparation of medicaments as dispensers

ii. Should know what is wholesome and what is unwholesome to the patient

iii. Should be able to provide what is wholesome and remove what is unwholesome

iv. Should perform the attendance work out of compassion for the patient without any hope of gain in return

v. Should not become loathful in removing the patient's excrements, urine, vomit etc. and

vi. Should be able to please and gladden the patient with suitable good conversation befitting the occasion, whenever such behavior becomes necessary.

What an ideal nurse or attendant the Buddha had in his mind! Is there any possible improvement in these requirements in this 21st century from what he has said in the 6th century BC?

A combination of these five requirements would make a perfect nurse/attendant for all time - some of them impossible in today's world. Every requirement is equally important and they complement one another in a perfect equilibrium.

It may be noted here that the Buddha does not stop here in giving lessons on this subject. He next goes on enumerating the qualities that should be found in the patient as well if he were to really benefit from the treatment and recover from his or her illness. When we examine the Buddha's comprehensive account of diseases, their causes and remedies for them, the basic qualities that should be found in physicians, nurses, attendants and even in the patients it becomes amply evident that during his days in the 6th century BC Indian medical system, even in public health, could boast of a very high standard as also

corroborated by the wonderful stories of surgery performed by royal physician Jeevaka.

Archaeological remains of hospitals found in India and Sri Lanka also support this. In this brief discussion on the values of nursing the sick it would be quite an injustice if we forget that wonderful personality in this field from the West, Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), the Italian-born British woman who dedicated her whole life for this service, to the extent of a self-mortification. Generally regarded as the founder of modern nursing this "angel with the lamp" was born with a silver spoon in the mouth but felt herself frustrated and miserable in the idle luxury of her home.



Thus she was pushing herself towards a genuine renunciation of all mundane wealth and comforts for the sake of her chosen ideal of public nursing.

Very strong and even furious objections from her parents and relatives could not deter her when at the age of seven years she got a message from providence like Joan of Arc calling her for the service.

Starting with administering a small hospital in London she developed herself to be the ideal nursing lady in her extremely dedicated service in the Crimean war.

Her life story is a standing tribute to what the Buddha has defined as the ideal in this field. She has exemplified these requirements for all time thereby becoming immortalised as the respected founder of modern nursing.



Thus, whether in the orient or the occident, nursing the sick is recognised as a highly meritorious vocation. It has also a rich legacy behind it in both hemispheres.

This writer recently had the pleasant experience of participating in a programme of demonstrating this

universal spirit when a Western type of private hospital in Colombo got down a 105-year-old more or less immobilised Buddhist monk from Kandy and gave him a comprehensive medical check-up completely free of charge to mark their first anniversary of service in Sri Lanka. All the doctors, nurses, attendants, labourers etc. who took part in it exemplified this noble tradition.

However, last but not least, it is quite sad to say that at times we have been forced to witness not only un-Buddhistic but the generally unethical habit of ridiculing one's enemies by referring to their illnesses or even physical deformities. It is a misfortune!

Chapter 8



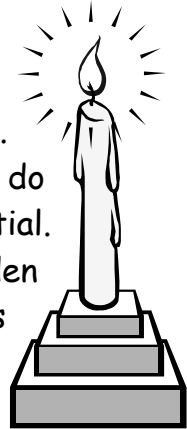
POWER OF CHANTING

THE MEANING OF PRAYER

-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

Nature is impartial; it cannot be flattered by prayers. It does not grant any special favours on request. Humans are not fallen creatures but rising angels. Prayers are answered by the power of their own minds.

According to Buddhism, humans are potential masters of themselves. Only because of their deep ignorance do they fail to realise their full potential. Since the Buddha has shown this hidden power, people must cultivate their minds and try to develop it by realising their innate ability.



A story will illustrate this point. An eagle once laid her egg in the nest of a hen. The hen hatched the eagle's egg along with her own. The hatchlings then followed the mother hen about as she taught them to focus on the ground to find their food. The eaglet, thinking it was a chicken did the same. One day however, it saw an eagle flying high up in the sky, and decided to do the same. The other

chickens laughed at him, but he did not care. Everyday he persevered until one day he became strong enough and soared up into the air and became a lord of the skies, while the other chickens continued to eke out a living on the ground. We must think like that eagle.

Buddhism gives full responsibility and dignity to human beings. It makes them their own masters. According to Buddhism, no higher being sits in judgment over a person's affairs and destiny. That is to say, our life, our society, our world, is what you and I want to make out of it, and not what some other unknown being wants it to be.

Remember that nature is impartial; it cannot be flattered by prayers. Nature does not grant any special favors on request. THUS IN BUDDHISM, PRAYER IS MEDITATION WHICH HAS SELF-CHANGE AS ITS OBJECT. PRAYER IN MEDITATION ACTS AS AN AID TO RECONDITION ONE'S NATURE. It is the transforming of one's inner nature accomplished by the purification of the three faculties—thought, word and deed. Through meditation, we can understand that 'we become what we think', in accordance with the discoveries of psychology. When we pray, we

experience some belief in our minds; that is, the psychological effect that we have created through our faith and devotion. After reciting certain verses we also experience the same result. Religious names or symbols are important to the extent that they help to develop devotion and confidence, but must never be considered as ends in themselves.

The Buddha Himself has clearly expressed that neither the recital of holy scriptures, nor self-torture, nor sleeping on the ground, nor the repetition of prayers, penances, hymns, charms, mantras, incantations and invocations can bring the real happiness of Nirvana, only purification of the mind through self effort can do this.

Regarding the use of prayers for attaining the final goal, the Buddha once used an analogy of a man who wants to cross a river. If he sits down and prays, imploring that the far bank of the river will come to him and carry him across, then his prayer will not be answered. If he really wants to cross the river, he must make some effort; he must find some logs and build a raft, or look for a bridge or construct a boat or perhaps swim. Somehow he must work to get across the river. Likewise, if he wants to cross

the river of Samsara, prayers alone are not enough. He must work hard by living a religious life, by controlling his passions, calming his mind, and by getting rid of all the impurities and defilements in his mind. Only then can he reach the final goal. Prayer alone will never take him to the final goal.

IF PRAYER IS NECESSARY, IT SHOULD BE TO STRENGTHEN AND FOCUS THE MIND AND NOT TO BEG FOR GAINS. The following prayer of a poet teaches us how to pray. Buddhists can regard this as meditation to cultivate the mind:



"LET ME NOT PRAY TO BE SHELTERED FROM DANGERS,
BUT TO BE FEARLESS IN FACING THEM.
LET ME NOT BEG FOR THE STILLING OF MY PAIN,
BUT FOR THE HEART TO CONQUER IT.
LET ME NOT CRAVE IN ANXIOUS FEAR TO BE SAVED,
BUT FOR THE PATIENCE TO WIN MY FREEDOM"

DO BUDDHIST PRAY FOR HEALTH AND HEALING?



Do Buddhists pray for health and healing?

This depends a lot on the definition of prayer. In his book, "Faith and Prayer in the Healing of Cancer", Dr. Chris defines prayer as follows:

"Recognition and acceptance of a Supreme Being who is beyond us in intelligence and power. Having a harmonious relationship with Him provides us with the confidence that He will guide us in our next step to take in life"

If we follow the above generic definition of prayer, then Buddhist do pray a lot for health and healing. The Supreme Being and the guide in this context is of course the Buddha. Buddhist prayer is usually in the form of chanting, reflection, meditation, meaningful ritual etc. Having said that Buddhists do pray a lot, the dynamics of how prayer works in Buddhism is different from what is believed in conventional prayers. Through Buddhist prayers, we are actually

repeatedly being reminded to practice His teachings (Dharma) and that automatically creates the conditions conducive for health and healing. The prayer itself calms the mind and facilitates healing. It is therefore a SELF-HEALING with confidence in the Buddha as a supreme guide. It is NOT a begging or bribing process whereby the Buddha is expected to physically come to us and heal our sickness. The Buddha doesn't do that. He helps us and 'answers our prayer' but in a different way - through His teachings. I pray that we all understand that.



PRAYER INDEED IS GOOD,
BUT WHILE CALLING ON THE GODS,
A MAN SHOULD HIMSELF LEND A HAND

-Hippocrates (460 BC - 377 BC)-

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARITTA CHANTING

-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

Paritta chanting is the recital of some of the Sutras uttered by the Buddha in the Pali language for the blessing and protection of the devotees.

Paritta Chanting or Sutra Chanting is a well known Buddhist practice conducted all over the world, especially in Theravada Buddhist countries where the Pali language is used for recitals. Many of these are important sutras from the basic teachings of the Buddha which were recorded by His disciples. Originally, these sutras were recorded on ola leaves about two thousand years ago. Later, they were compiled into a book known as the 'Paritta Chanting Book'. The names of the original books from which these sutras were selected are the ANGUTTARA NIKAYA, MAJJHIMA NIKAYA, DIGHA NIKAYA, SAMYUTTA NIKAYA and KUDDAKA NIKAYA in the SUTRA PITAKA. The sutras that Buddhists recite for protection are known as Paritta Chanting. Here 'protection means shielding ourselves from various forms of evil spirits, misfortune, sickness and influence of the planetary systems as well as instilling confidence in the mind'. The vibrant sound of the

chanting creates a very pleasing atmosphere in the vicinity. The rhythm of the chanting is also important. One might have noticed that when monks recite these sutras, different intonations are adopted to harmonise with different sutras intended for different quarters. It was found very early during man's spiritual development that certain rhythms of the human voice could produce significant psychological states of peacefulness and serenity in the minds of ardent listeners. Furthermore, intonation at certain levels would appeal to devas, whilst certain rhythms would create a good influence over lower beings like animals, snakes, or even spirits or ghosts. Therefore, a soothing and correct rhythm is an important aspect of Paritta Chanting.

The use of these rhythms is not confined to Buddhism alone. In every religion, when the followers recite their prayers by using the holy books, they follow certain rhythms. We can observe this when we listen to Quran reading by Muslims and the Veda Mantra Chanting by Hindu priests in the Sanskrit language. Some lovely chanting is also carried out by certain Christian groups, especially the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox sects.

When the sutras are chanted, three great and powerful forces are activated. These are the forces of the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. Buddhism is the combination of these 'Three Jewels' and when invoked together they can bring great blessings to mankind.

(1) The BUDDHA. He had cultivated all the great virtues, wisdom and enlightenment, and spiritual development before He gave us His noble Teachings. Even



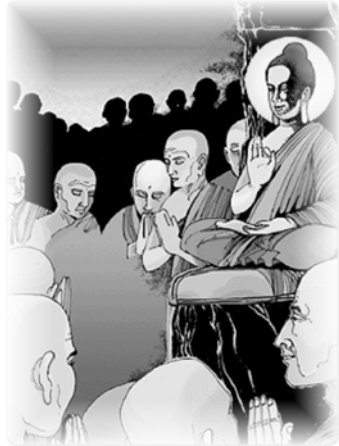
though the physical presence of the Teacher is no more with us, His Teachings have remained for the benefit of mankind. Similarly, the man who discovered electricity is no more with us, yet by using his knowledge, the effect of his wisdom still remains. The illumination that we enjoy today is the result of his wisdom. The scientists who discovered atomic energy are no longer living, but the knowledge to use it remains with us. Likewise the Noble Teachings given us through the Buddha's wisdom and enlightenment are a most effective power for people to draw inspiration from. When you remember Him and respect Him, you develop confidence in Him. When you recite or listen to the words uttered by Him, you invoke the power of His blessings.

(2) The DHARMA. It is the power of truth, justice and peace discovered by the Buddha which provides spiritual solace for devotees to maintain peace and happiness. When you develop your compassion, devotion and understanding, this power of the Dharma protects you and helps you to develop more confidence and strength in your mind. Then your mind itself becomes a very powerful force for your own protection. When it is known that you uphold the Dharma, people and other beings will respect you. The power of the Dharma protects you from various kinds of bad influence and evil forces. Those who cannot understand the power of the Dharma and how to live in accordance with the Dharma, invariably surrender themselves to all forms of superstitious beliefs and subject themselves to the influence of many kinds of gods, spirits and mystical powers which require them to perform pointless rites and rituals. By so doing, they only develop more fear and suspicion born out of ignorance. Large sums of money are spent on such practices and this could be easily avoided if people were to develop their confidence in the Dharma. Dharma is also described as 'nature' or 'natural phenomena', 'cosmic law' or 'gravity' or a 'magnet'. Those who have learnt the nature of these forces



can protect themselves through the Dharma by harmonising with them. When the mind is calmed through perfect knowledge disturbances cannot create fear.

(3) The SANGHA. This word refers to the holy order of monks who have renounced their worldly life for their spiritual development. They are considered as disciples of the Buddha, who have cultivated great virtues to attain sainthood or Arahant hood. We pay respect to the Sangha community as the custodians of the Buddha Sasana or those who had protected and introduced the Dharma to the world over the last 2,500 years. The services rendered by the Sangha community have guided mankind to lead a righteous and noble life. They are the living link with the Enlightened One who brings His message to us through the recital of the words uttered by Him.



The chanting of sutras for blessing was started during the Buddha's time. Later, in certain Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar, this practice was developed further by organising

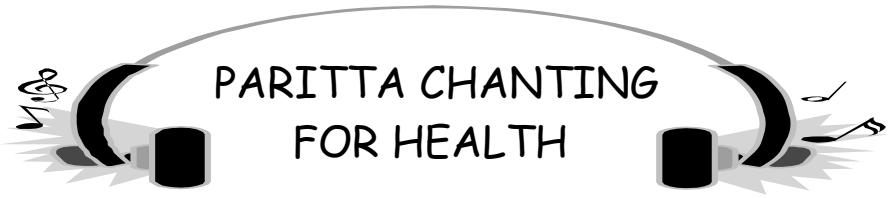
prolonged chanting for one whole night or for several days. With great devotion, devotees today participate in the chanting sessions by listening attentively and intelligently. There were some occasions when the Buddha and His disciples chanted sutras to bring spiritual solace to people suffering from epidemics, famines, sickness and other natural disasters. On one occasion, when a child was reported to be affected by some evil influence, the Buddha instructed His monks to recite sutras to give protection to the child.

The blessing service, by way of chanting, was effective. Of course, there were instances when the sutra chanting could not be effective if the victims had committed some strong bad karma. Nevertheless, certain minor bad karmic effects can be overcome by the vibrant power combined with the great virtues and compassion of those holy people who chant these sutras. However the effect of strong bad karma can be temporarily delayed, but it cannot be eradicated altogether.

Devotees who were tired or fatigued have experienced relief and calmness after listening to the chanting of sutras. Such an experience is different from that provided by music because music can create excitement in our mind and pander to our emotions

but does not create spiritual devotion and confidence. For the last 2,500 years, Buddhist devotees have experienced the good effects of sutra chanting. We should try to understand how and why the words uttered by the Buddha for blessing purposes could be so effective even after His passing away. It is mentioned in the Buddha's teaching that ever since He had the aspiration to become a Buddha during His previous births, He had strongly upheld one particular principle, namely, 'to abstain from telling lies'. Without abusing or misusing His words, He spoke gently without hurting the feelings of others. The power of Truth has become a source of strength in the words uttered by the Buddha with great compassion. However, the power of the Buddha's word alone is not enough to secure blessing without the devotion and understanding of the devotees.

The supernatural effect experienced by many people in ridding themselves of their sickness and many other mental disturbances through the medium of the Buddhist sutras and meditation are proof that they can be extremely efficacious if used with devotion and confidence.



What is Paritta chanting?

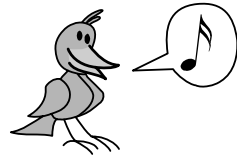
Parittta is a pali word that means protection. Paritta chanting refers to the recitation of selected suttas or discourses of the Buddha for protection and deliverance from harm and danger. Among the Paritta suttas commonly chanted for health reasons are Atanatiya Sutta, Metta Sutta, Bhojjanga Sutta, Ratana Sutta and Angulimala Sutta. We can chant them for our own good health and also use them to bless others with good health.

What are the three types of Paritta?

Sayadaw U Pandita extends the popular use of the word Paritta by adding adjectives to it. In this way, there are three kinds of Paritta; Audio Paritta, Recitative Paritta and Practical Paritta. Audio Paritta means the protection got by listening to the paritta recited by others (usually monks). Recitative Paritta means protection got by reciting the paritta

personally. Practical Paritta means protection got by practising the Dharma of morality, concentration and insight. This is the most powerful paritta because it uproots the ultimate cause of all sickness; greed, hatred and delusion.

How does Paritta chanting work?



1. The power of **CONFIDENCE**. If we chant or listen with the mind saying, "It won't work! It won't work! It won't work!" of course it would unlikely to work. On the other hand, if we do it with full of confidence in the Triple Gem, it will more likely to work.

2. The power of **SOUND**. The vibratory & harmonious sounds of the chanting are soothing to the nerves. It calms and relaxes the mind. Thus, people can still benefit from the chanting even though they don't really understanding the content.

3. The power of **TRUTH** and **UNDERSTANDING**. The power of truth protects the follower of truth. Listening to the paritta invokes the Buddha nature in us and motivates us to walk the Buddha's path. Thus, we acquire Practical Paritta,

4. The power of **METTA**. Having a monk or friends

who bother to chant for us and be kind to us would definitely help in healing. Don't forget that we must also love ourselves for effective healing to take place.

5. The power of MORALITY. Keeping the precepts well will release us from guilt that is detrimental for healing. When we are guilty, we psychologically punish ourselves by not allowing us to get well. Keeping the precepts also generate good karma that supports good health.

Who should do Paritta chanting and where can it be done when we are sick?

1. We can learn the chanting and do it ourselves in a quiet and peaceful environment. But, when we are very sick, we may need someone to chant to us. In such a situation, hetero-suggestion may work better than autosuggestion. Even the Buddha once requested his disciple, Cunda to chant for Him the Bojjhanga Sutta when He was sick.

2. We can go to a Buddhist temple & do the chanting together with a monk representing the Triple Gem. This has greater psychological impact. The peaceful environment of a temple also adds on to the efficacy of the chanting.

3. We can invite a Buddhist monk to do the chanting for us at home/hospital. This is especially when we are sick and physically inconvenient to go to a temple.

4. We can listen to the chanting by monks recorded in CD or cassette. This is a convenient way of doing it. It should be practised regularly even when we are not sick, so that we can familiarize ourselves with it. It's easier to learn the chanting and its meaning when we are strong and healthy rather than when we are sick.



Once, a monk was called to heal a sick child with a few words of Paritta chanting. A skeptic in the crowd observed it all and expressed doubts about such a superficial way of healing. The master turned to him & said, "You know nothing of this matters, you are an ignorant fool!" The skeptic became very upset. He turned red & shook with anger. Before he could gather himself to reply, the master spoke again, "When one word has the power to make you hot & angry, why should not another word has the power to heal?"

☸ For further information on Paritta chanting, kindly refer to the book, "Paritta Pali, Protective Verses - A Collection of 11 Protective Suttas" by Sayadaw U Silananda. The book has an English translation & comes with an audio CD of the chanting.



ANGULIMALA PARITTA

Recital to bless
expectant mothers
for easy childbirth



OH, SISTER! EVER SINCE I WAS REBORN IN THIS NOBLE BIRTH (ARAHATHOOD), I DO NOT REMEMBER INTENTIONALLY TAKING THE LIFE OF A BEING. BY THIS UTTERANCE OF TRUTH, MAY THERE BE COMFORT TO YOU AND THE CHILD IN YOUR WOMB.

In some Buddhist countries, it is believed that when the Angulimala Paritta is used to bless the drinking water of an expectant mother, the woman would have an easy childbirth.

Venerable Angulimala on one of his usual daily rounds for alms, came upon a house where he heard the sharp cries of an expectant mother undergoing protracted labour. Feeling rather inadequate and helpless, he reported the incident to the Buddha. The Buddha then instructed Venerable Angulimala to return to the same house to give a recital whereupon the woman delivered her baby without further difficulties. Ever since, this recital has come to be known as the Angulima Paritta.

BODHI PUJA

-By Robert Yap Yen Choon-



The Bodhi tree has been an object of veneration since the Buddha's time. Usually after the rain retreat (Vassa), the Buddha will travel to other places. Then, many disciples and devotees from afar who came all the way to Jetavana Monastery could not meet up with Him during those times.

In view of that, the compassionate Venerable Ananda then approached the Buddha and asked, "Many devotees from afar were not able to see you when you are away. May you give them something that they may venerate?"

The Buddha replied that they may venerate the Bodhi tree as it will remind them of him, as a symbol of enlightenment. Venerable Moggallana who overheard the request, instantly used his psychic power, reached out his hand and took a sapling from the Maha Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya and planted it in Jetavana Monastery, which still survive after more than 2500 years till now. It was name as "Ananda Bodhi Tree".

Over the years, the veneration of the Bodhi tree has become more grand and evolved into a Bodhi Puja. It consists of offerings e.g. flowers, incense, fruits, candles, oil lamps, drinks, sweets etc. to the Buddha and guardian devas residing in the Bodhi tree and in the shrine area. There will also be recital of suttas such as Mangala Sutta, Karaniya Metta Sutta, Sumangala Sutta, Ratana Sutta, Angulimala Sutta etc.

They are several reasons why people perform the Bodhi Puja other than just for veneration. The common ones include; to overcome sickness, to break evil spells, to have good business, to do well in studies, to do well in interpersonal relationship, to dedicate merits etc. The suttas chanted by the monks or lay Buddhist therefore also depends on the purpose for which they are recited. For example, to ward of evil spirits and to overcome sickness, the Ratana Sutta is usually applied with Metta Sutta.

The following are some of the real life Bodhi Puja experience that has happened in the temple that I have been attending.

Once, there was a childless couple from Penang who has been hoping for a child for many years. They had been advised to perform a Bodhi Puja and to make wholesome aspirations. This was repeated and in the same year the couple had a baby boy and Reverend was informed that the baby is very intelligent.

It was also reported that once a member of the public confided to the Reverend that he is a 1st stage HIV positive patient and sorted his help. His family members came along with him and pleaded to the same monk whether there is any known traditional medicine or prayer which he can seek for divine intervention. The Reverend advised him to perform the Bodhi Puja over seven weeks. He dutifully and with great faith followed the Reverend's advice. Miraculously, he recovered from his sickness over several months. His doctor was stunned by his cure. He vowed that upon his successful recovery, he would do whatever the Reverend wants. At that time, the Reverend was sponsoring a poor child in Sri Lanka for a heart operation in India. He offered and paid the balance of the child's operation of RM 7000.

Recently, a businessman failed in his business. His bankers foreclosed two of his company's properties which were charged to the banks. He heard about the power of Bodhi Puja and decided to request the devas to help. From then onwards, his business began to recover.

On another occasion, a devotee in the temple had difficulty in collecting his rents from his delinquent tenants. They also refused to return the shops to the devotee. In desperation, he took the 3 Refuge and sought divine help at the Bodhi tree and vowed to enrol for the Novitiate Programme in 2004, upon securing the return of the property. At time of writing this article, he has already had his wish come true and performed his novice monk programme.



PRAYER IS AN IMPORTANT PRACTICE
THAT SERVES TO INTERNALIZE THE
IDEALS OF THE BUDDHIST PATH

-G.R. Lewis-

KWAN YIN & OM MANI PADME HUM

Faith or confidence is a very important factor in spiritual healing. It is unlikely to work if a devout Buddhist was asked to recite the Quran or Bible for spiritual healing. In view of this faith factor, those who have greater psychologically affinity to Kwan Yin should respond better to prayer or chanting associated with her.



Kwan Yin's actual name is Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. He has many other names e.g. Guan Shi Yin Pu Sa (The Bodhisattva Who Regards the World's Sounds), The Thousand-Handed and Thousand-Eyed Bodhisattva, The Goddess of Mercy etc. Irrespective of whatever names, He is basically an embodiment of the virtue of great compassion.

After becoming a Buddha*, Kwan Yin made a great compassionate vow. He vowed that whoever chants his name,

**NAMO QIAN SHOU, QIAN YAN,
DA BEI GUAN SHI YIN PUSA**

(Homage to the "Thousand-handed, thousand-eyed, greatly compassionate Bodhisattva who regards the sounds of the world")

or chant His Six Character Great Bright Mantra, **OM MANI PADME HUM** whole-heartedly, and mindful of His value of compassion, He shall respond to him immediately to alleviate his sufferings and adversity (including sickness).

Whoever chants the **GREAT COMPASSIONATE MANTRA (DA BEI ZHOU)** 'popularised' by Him would also have similar benefits of freedom from sickness and good health. Venerable Master Hsuan Hua said, "The Great Compassionate Mantra can relieve living beings of all suffering and difficulty. Because it relieves suffering and bestows happiness, it's called the Great Compassionate Mantra. Most importantly, it can cure sickness. No matter what your sickness, if you chant the Great Compassionate Mantra, you will be cured".

People might complain that after chanting the mantras, there is no or partial result. It is important to emphasize that the chanting has to be done whole-heartedly and with the spirit of compassion. I'm sure Kwan Yin will not help anyone who chants His name insincerely and with a wicked mind e.g.

"Om Mani Padme Hum! More Money Coming Home! If you really exist and are that powerful, let me immediately recover from my sickness. Then, I can take revenge and kill the idiot who made me sick". Although it is not mentioned directly, in my humble opinion, I think the way how mantras work in promoting good health is similar to those as described in Paritta chanting earlier.

It is interesting to note that the 84 verses of the Great Compassionate Mantra are the names of the 84 Bodhisattvas who control the 84, 000 calamities that are experienced in our world. Hence, reciting this mantra actually gives protection by all these Bodhisattvas. Those who would like to have a more thorough understanding of the Great Compassionate Mantra, you may refer to the English translation of the commentaries by Master Hsuan Hua.

IN MANY RELIGIONS,
GOD IS NOT REGARDED AS A PERSON,
BUT A FORCE PERSONIFIED IN THE MIND
-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

*Note: In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, Kwan Yin is only a bodhisatta, one who aspires to become a Buddha and in the process of spiritual training. In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, Kwan Yin has already completed the spiritual training to perfection and thus is a Buddha.

COMMON PRAYER

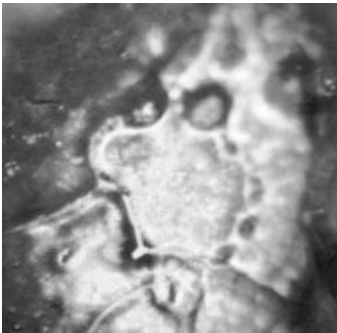


YOU SAY A PRAYER IN YOUR RELIGION,
AND I'LL SAY A PRAYER AS I KNOW IT,
TOGETHER WE WILL SAY THIS PRAYER
AND IT WILL BE SOMETHING
BEAUTIFUL TO GOD.

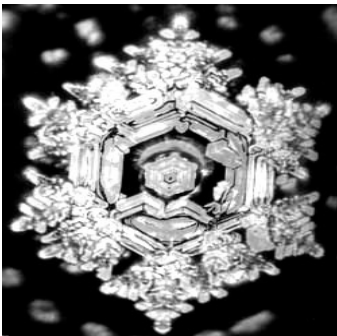
-Mother Teresa-

POWER OF PRAYER

A Japanese researcher by the name Mr. Emotos has been visually documenting molecular changes in water by means of his special photographic techniques. He is able to show us the different crystalline structures of water under different condition. For instance, the water crystals before and after prayer look like the following:



Before PRAYER



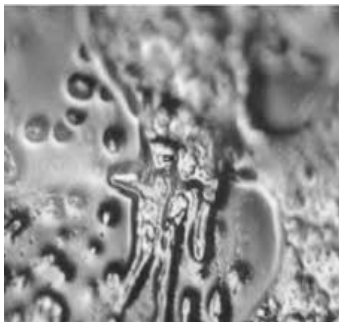
After PRAYER

Mr. Emotos's work has provided us with factual evidence, that human vibrational energy, thoughts, words, ideas and music can affect the molecular structure of water, the very same water that comprises over seventy percent of a mature human body and covers the same amount of our planet.

So, be careful with what we think, wish and say to others. We can radiate positive thought e.g. METTA or we can radiate negative thought e.g. ANGER. We can HEAL and we can also KILL others and the environment. Choose wisely!



Water crystal in a test tube
with a THANK YOU label



Water crystal in a test tube
With a YOU MAKE ME SICK,
I WILL KILL YOU label

SCIENTIFIC PRAYER

There is an often quoted research done by cardiologist, Dr. Randolph Gyrd.

This study focused on 393 patients admitted to the coronary care unit (CCU) at the San Francisco General Hospital, USA. This study was a randomised, double-blind experiment. The patients were divided into two groups:



Group 1 consisted of 192 patients. Roman Catholics and Protestant groups were given the names of patients. They were asked to pray for the patients. Each patient had five to seven people praying for her/him.

Group 2 consisted of 201 patients. No one prayed for them.

Results:	Group 1	Group2
Those who required antibiotics	3	17
Those requiring diuretics	5	15
Those with cardiopulmonary arrests	3	14
Suffering from pneumonia	3	13
Suffering from heart failure	8	20
Require endotracheal intubation	0	12

As shown, the patients who received prayers did much better medically than those who did not. This study was published in the Southern Medical Journal 81:826-829. Would Buddhist prayers have the same effect as well? There is no reason not to be so! Perhaps someone should do a study on the efficacy of Metta Prayer in CCU patients.



RELIGION WITHOUT
SCIENCE IS BLIND
SCIENCE WITHOUT
RELIGION IS CRIPPLED

-Albert Einstein-

Chapter 9



DEATH & DYING

THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF THE DYING - A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE



Compiled by: Ven. Pende Hawter

Introduction

In discussing the spiritual needs of the dying from the Buddhist perspective, we firstly need to look at several key points, namely:

- *Gaining an understanding of the shortness and preciousness of life.*
- *Considering what can help ourselves and others at the same time of death.*
- *Considering what goes on after death.*
- *The Buddhist concept of mind.*

Reflections on death

In order to gain an understanding of the shortness and preciousness of life and how to make it Meaningful, we need to reflect on the fact that death is certain and that the time of death is uncertain.

These points may seem obvious but we rarely stop to consider the truth of them.

For example, when we consider that death is certain we can reflect on several points:



- 1) There is no possible way to escape death (nobody ever has),*
- 2) Life has a definite, inflexible limit and each moment brings us closer to the end of this life, and*
- 3) Death comes in a moment and it's time is unexpected (and even while alive we devote very little of our life to spiritual practice).*

When reflecting on the fact that the time of death is uncertain we can analyse this further by recognising that:

- 1) The duration of our lifespan is uncertain - young people can die before old people, the healthy before the sick, etc.*
- 2) There are many causes and circumstances that lead to death but few that favour the sustenance of life - in fact even the things that sustain life and make it comfortable can kill us e.g. food, our house, our car.*

3) The weakness and fragility of our body contributes to life's uncertainty - our body can be easily destroyed by disease or accident.

Reflecting on these points can help us to realise that life is short and precious and that there is no time to lose. It is good to remind ourselves of these points each day. It can be very helpful when first getting up each day to say to ourselves "TODAY MAY BE THE LAST DAY OF MY LIFE, LET ME LIVE IT THEREFORE BY MAKING IT AS MEANINGFUL AS POSSIBLE, BEING OF BENEFIT TO OTHERS"

It can also be very helpful to consider how we would react if we were told, for example, that we only had 3 or 6 months to live, to ask ourselves questions like:

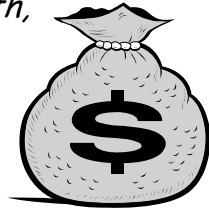
- *Am I ready to die?*
- *What unfinished business do I have?*
- *What do I want to do or achieve in the time I have left?*
- *Will my priorities change?*
- *What can help me at the time of death?*

**LIVE EACH DAY AS THOUGH IT IS
YOUR LAST AND ONE DAY YOU'LL BE RIGHT!**

The other critical point is to consider what will help us at the time of death. Reflection here reveals that:

1) *Worldly possessions such as wealth, position or money can't help us.*

2) *Relatives and friends can neither prevent death nor go with us.*



3) *Even our own precious body is of no help to us and we have to leave it behind.*

So ultimately the only thing that can help us is the state of our mind, the state of our mental or spiritual development.

Karma and the mind

How is this so? The Buddhist belief is that every action of body, speech and mind that we create lays down a subtle imprint in our mind which has the potential to ripen as future happiness or suffering, depending on whether the action was positive or negative. These imprints remain in the mind until they ripen or until they are purified or cleansed by spiritual practices. This process is known as the law of karma.

The mind itself is formless, shapeless, colourless, genderless, and has the ability to know or cognize all phenomena. Its basic nature is luminous and knowing. The mind also has different levels - gross, subtle, and very subtle. The very subtle mind is very clear and is usually only experienced at the time of death or during advanced meditation practices. The imprints of our actions (karmic imprints) are stored in the very subtle mind.



Death, intermediate state and rebirth

At the time of death, the body and mind go through a process of dissolution, where the 25 psycho-physical constituents that we are comprised of gradually absorb and lose their ability to function. This process of dissolution is associated with external and internal signs. This process continues even after the breathing ceases, for up to 3 days.

During this process the mind becomes more and more subtle and clear until it eventually reaches the point of the 'clear light of death', where it is said to be approximately 9 times more clear than in the normal waking state. At this point the mind separates from

the body, taking with it all of the subtle imprints from that life and previous ones.

This very subtle mind or consciousness and the very subtle wind upon which it rides then arises into an intermediate state (bardo) being which has a subtle (non-physical) body that can move through solid objects, travel anywhere just by thinking of that place, and so on. The intermediate state being stays in that state for up to 7 weeks, by which time a suitable place of rebirth is usually found. This place of rebirth is determined by the force of karma, whereby the intermediate state being dies and the consciousness is propelled without control towards the place of rebirth. The consciousness enters the fertilized egg at or near the moment of conception and the new life begins.

Crucial in this whole process is the state of mind at the time of death, because it is this that determines the situation a person will be reborn into.



If the mind is calm and peaceful and imbued with positive thoughts at the time of death, this will augur well for a happy rebirth. However, if the mind is in a state of anger or has strong desire or is fearful etc, this will predispose to an unhappy or lower type of rebirth.

The mind that arises at the time of death is usually the one that the person is most habituated to. People tend to die in character, although this is not always so. So in the Buddhist tradition it is emphasised strongly that the time to prepare for death is now, because if we develop and gain control over our mind now and create many positive causes we will have a calm and controlled mind at the time of death and be free of fear. In effect, our whole life is a preparation for death and it is said that the mark of a spiritual practitioner is to have no regrets at the time of death. As a friend of mine said recently on hearing about these concepts, "Perhaps it's time I started swotting for the finals!"

The Spiritual Needs of the Dying

When considering the spiritual needs of the dying, the basic principle is to do whatever you can do to help the person die with a calm and peaceful mind, with spiritual/positive thoughts uppermost. This is because it is believed that the state of mind at the time of death is vitally important and plays an important role in determining what will happen to the person after death.

So whether we are a doctor or nurse relieving pain and other distressing symptoms and reassuring the

family, a counselor helping to resolve emotional issues, a minister of religion offering spiritual counsel, or a volunteer who offers companionship and support for the dying person and their loved ones, we are all contributing significantly towards obtaining this calm and peaceful state of mind.

Within this basic principle, there are several ways we can categorise people which will help to determine the type of spiritual support that they need, namely:

Is the person conscious or unconscious?

- If conscious, you can do the practices with them or get them to do them.
- If unconscious, you have to do the practices for them.

Does the person have specific religious beliefs or not?

- If religious, remind them of their religious practices.
- If not religious, encourage them to have positive thoughts, or remind them of positive things they have done.

For a person with a spiritual faith it is beneficial to have spiritual objects around them e.g. an altar, a rosary, photos of their spiritual teacher, or to play spiritual music, or to burn incense, and so on - whatever reminds them of their spiritual practice. It is good also to talk to them about their spiritual practices, recite prayers with them and so forth. For an unconscious person it is said to be good to recite prayers, mantras etc. into their ear.



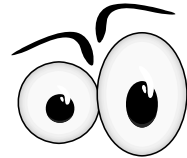
If a person does not have a spiritual faith, it is helpful to remind them of positive things they have done in their life, or of positive qualities such as love and compassion and kindness.

It is important to avoid religious activities that are inappropriate or unwanted by the dying person. Someone standing at the end of the bed reciting prayers may be an annoyance, and I have seen a case of an attempted deathbed salvation which greatly angered the dying person.

The basic aim is to avoid any objects or people that generate strong attachment or anger in the mind of the dying person. From the spiritual viewpoint it is desirable to avoid loud shows of emotion in the

presence of the dying person. We have to remind ourselves that the dying process is of great spiritual importance and we don't want to disturb the mind of the dying person, which is in an increasingly clear and subtle state. We have to do whatever we can to allow the person to die in a calm/happy/peaceful state of mind.

Meditations for sick and dying people



For those who have advanced illness but are still conscious there are a number of simple meditation techniques or visualizations that can be very helpful.

For those who are anxious or fearful of dying, teaching them relaxation or guiding them through a simple relaxation technique can be very beneficial. I will usually leave them a relaxation tape that they can use any time of day or night, whenever the need arises. When appropriate, touch, massage, reflexology and similar techniques can also be very soothing and stress-relieving, especially as the person may be somewhat starved of touch due to the fears and awkwardness of people who visit them.

A simple meditation technique that is very effective is awareness of the breath. The person becomes

aware of the movement of the breath inwards and outwards at the level of the nostrils, breathing naturally and easily, not forcing or exaggerating the breath. At the same time, any thoughts that arise are let go of, constantly bringing the mind back to the breath. This technique, although simple, can generate very calm states of mind and relieve anxiety.

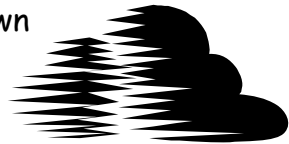
When the awareness of breath is then combined with the recitation of certain words or mantras or prayer it becomes very powerful. Just to say "Let...go...let...go..." in time with the in and out breaths can be soothing and relaxing. A person with a spiritual belief can use a prayer or mantra with the breath. For example, one lady whom I was visiting who was an ex-Catholic nun chose the prayer "not mine, Lord, but thy will be done". She shortened this by reciting "Not my will" on the in-breath and "but yours" on the out-breath, repeating this over and over again.

The beauty of this technique is that 1) It can be done for short periods of time and requires little concentration, which is often reduced by the effects of disease and medication, 2) It helps to calm the mind and reduce anxiety, 3) It utilizes and strengthens the person's spiritual refuge, 4) It does not require anything other than the breath.

For both a religious and a non-religious person a white light 'healing' meditation can bring a lot of comfort and benefit. The person visualizes a brilliant ball of white light above their head, with the light streaming down through their bodies, removing sickness, pain, fear, anxiety and filling the body with blissful healing light energy. Depending on the person's belief system, they can see the light as being in the nature of Jesus, or Buddha or some other spiritual figure, or they can just visualize it as a source of universal healing energy. This meditation combines very well with the breath awareness technique and is also good to have on tape to leave with the person, to be used whenever needed day or night. When a person is close to death they can also be encouraged to let go into the light, into the heart of Jesus or Buddha seated above their head, whatever is appropriate for that person.

The use of guided imagery or gentle music can also be soothing and relaxing and help the person to have a calm and peaceful mind as they approach death. A person in pain can also be guided through a pain meditation, a technique whereby the pain is explored in detail, often leading to a reduction or eradication of the pain. A very profound meditative technique is to actually use the illness or pain as a way of developing compassion. For those who can use this technique the results can be very great. The person is

encouraged to think that "by me experiencing this cancer/AIDS/pain etc, may all other beings in the world be free of this, and may they have good health, happiness and long life". The person uses their sickness or pain as a way of opening their heart to others who are in a similar situation. People who have used this technique have often gone from being totally caught up in their own misery to a state of open-heartedness and peace.



An even more advanced technique is the meditation on "taking and giving on the breath" as described in the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. In this meditation, one visualizes taking on the suffering of all other living beings (or this could be restricted to those with cancer or AIDS etc) in the form of black smoke, which is taken in on the in-breath. Then on the out-breath all of our health and happiness and all positive qualities are sent out to other living beings in the form of white light, and we visualize them receiving everything that they want. At our heart we visualize a black rock of selfishness, and as the black smoke is inhaled we visualize it hitting the black rock and smashing it completely, thus eradicating all trace of selfishness from our minds.

This meditation is a profound method for developing compassion quickly but there will only be a minority of patients who will be able to use this method. The usual way to progress in these meditations is to start with small problems such as a headache or tiredness etc, then gradually train our minds to transform bigger and bigger problems.

Conclusion

The aim of all these methods is to help the dying person die with a calm, happy and positive mind. Anything that we can do to achieve this will benefit the person, whether that be good nursing care and pain relief, massage, the presence of a loving family, or whatever. It is said that the best thing we can bring to a dying person is our own quiet and peaceful mind.



In this way we will help the dying person make the transition from this life to the next as smooth and as meaningful as possible, recognising the vital spiritual importance of this transition.

My wish is that this short paper may in some way be of benefit to those who read it and reflect on it, and hence to the sick or suffering people that you serve.

☺ DEATH ☺



Death is never far away
I've counted over 60
Whom I know or saw
And now I know for sure
They're no more
They seemed so alive
Just the other day
They talked, they laughed
And even cried
Now they're gone
To where who knows?

Death is just a thought away
My breath soon will stop too they say
But where will I go?
What will I be?
Who knows?

Beings have died
More will die
None escapes Death's jaws
Each year the number rise
No tears can wash away their deeds
Or turn the corpses in their graves
So let the past be dead
For life must go on
Mourning is not the way of the wise

- Venerable Sujiva -



Life is uncertain but death is certain!

THINGS TO BE DONE WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER IS CRITICALLY ILL

(A guide to proper Buddhist funeral
by Koperasi Buddhisme Malaysia Berhad)

1. Overcome our own fear and attachment. Be calm, peaceful and allow our family member to go.

2. The dying person too should be encouraged to accept death as a natural and inevitable phenomenon, and that all of us come according to our karma and have to go according to our karma.



3. He should constantly be encouraged to reflect on the good deeds that he has done, and be assured that these wholesome deeds of his will lead him to a good rebirth and support him in his life.

4. Family members may assure the dying person that he need not worry about them, that he should keep his mind calm and peaceful, and that it will be all right to go when his time comes.

5. Give donations and do other meritorious deeds in his name and share the merit with him. If possible,

get him personally involved in the meritorious act, or else he should be informed about it and should acknowledge it.

6. If the dying person has faith in the Buddhasasana, a small image of the Buddha, Kwan Yin or some of the bodhisatta which the sick person has faith in, may be placed strategically by his bedside as an object for contemplation (a constant reminder of the noble qualities the icons represent).

7. Chanting of appropriate parittas (protective verses) by either monks or laymen could be organised to comfort the dying person and his family members.

8. He should be encouraged to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Monks could be invited for breakfast or lunch dana and gifts in the form of requisites could be prepared for him to offer to the Sangha.

9. If the dying person has been practising meditation, remind him of the importance of mindfulness. Encourage him to constantly note the arising and falling of events e.g. thoughts, memories, emotions, visions and sensory perceptions.

10. Dhamma friends who are practitioners of meditation can be invited to radiate loving-kindness (metta) to the dying person to ease his suffering.

11. If a family member has little faith in the Buddhasasana or belongs to another religion, encourage him to have faith, to pray, to have positive thoughts, etc. in accordance with his religious beliefs and practices. Do not try to impose your own beliefs to convert him as this may give rise to confusion, disturbing emotions or negative thoughts in the mind of the dying.

12. If a family member had no religion, but seems to be open-minded, you can try to talk about the Dhamma, for example, about loving-kindness and compassion, about the truth of impermanence, about Four Noble Truths etc. You can try to talk about the Buddha, taking refuge in the Triple Gem, etc, but be sensitive, don't be aggressive, otherwise the person may react negatively.

13. If the person had no interest in religious or spiritual matters, find ways to talk to him so that he can be free from anger, attachment, fear, etc. and have a positive, peaceful state of mind.





LIFE NEVER DIES



-A Buddhist Funeral Song-

Life never dies although we live
In midst of change and death
Only the forms shall pass away
And not the spirits breath

The consciousness can never die
Although it seems to fade
It doth but pass to other forms
Which thoughts and acts have made

There is no death all nature cries
The rose will reappear
Its petal will more perfect be
After the winter drear

The tiny bird that lifeless falls
A victim to its prey
Returns again in higher forms
Upon its upward way

From life to life more high and free
The myriads forms evolve
O may we learn to know the truth
This mighty riddle solve



- Datuk Dr. Victor Wee -

LIFE IS UNCERTAIN DEATH IS CERTAIN

On one occasion, there was a young woman by the name Kisa Gotami whose infant son had died. Quite naturally, she was very attached to her baby and being overcome with grief, she walked around her village with the dead body, begging everyone to restore her son to life. Finally, she came to the Buddha who knew that in her distracted state, she was not ready to listen to an intellectual explanation on the nature of death. Instead, he wanted her to realize this truth for herself.

So, he said he would help her if she could bring a handful of mustard seeds from a person who had not lost a loved one. Kisa Gotami went from house to house but while people were happy to give her the mustard seed, everyone told that they had experienced the death of someone close to them during their lifetime. As the day wore on, Kisa Gotami was becoming tired, and her intense grief was abated. Her mind was now able to see that death is the common inheritance of anyone who is born. Her son, who had been born, had to die. Even if the Buddha had restored him to life, he would die eventually anyway. When she realized this, she began to understand that

all existence is meaningless. She buried her dead son, returned to the Buddha and became a nun and soon realized Ultimate Happiness.

BIRTHDAY INDICATION



BIRTHDAY ANNIVERSARY IS AN
INDICATION OF YOUR AGE.
YOU MUST WARN YOURSELF,
SAYING: "I AM ONE YEAR NEARER TO DEATH."
THOSE OF MY AGE AND THOSE YOUNGER & OLDER
THAN I AM HAVE BEEN DEAD.

-Ashin Janakabhivamsa-

LONGEVITY

How old do you want to live?



BETTER THAN A HUNDRED YEARS, IS ONE
DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PERSON WHO SEES
THE HIGHEST TRUTH

- Dhammapada -

CONTEMPLATION ON DEATH

(Buddha Puja: Cultivating the mind through devotion -
Compiled by Victor Wee)



I sit now before the Buddha and contemplate that He and all who knew Him are now dead. Since his great demise, countless beings have come, bided their time and gone. The names and deeds of but a few are remembered. Their many pains, their joys, their victories and defeats. Like themselves are now but shadows.

And so it will be with all whom I know. Passing time will turn into mere shadows the calamities I worry about, the possibilities I fear, and the pleasures I chase after. Therefore, I will contemplate the reality of my own death that I may understand what is of true value in life.

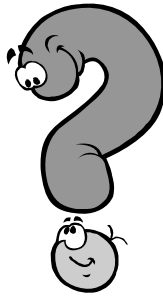
Because death may soon come, I will repay all debts, forgive all transgressions and be at odds with none. Because death may soon come, I will squander no time brooding on past mistakes but use each day as if it were my last. Because death may soon come, I will

purify my mind rather than pamper the body. Because death may soon come, and I will be separated from those I love, I will develop detached compassion rather than possessiveness and clinging.

Because death may soon come, I will use each day fully, not wasting it on fruitless pursuits and vain longings. May I be prepared when death finally comes. May I be fearless as life ebbs away. May my detachment help in the freeing of the heart.

THE LIFE SPAN OF A HUMAN BEING
IS ONLY AS LONG AS ONE BREATH -
WHEN YOU EXHALE BUT DON'T INHALE
YOU WILL BE DEAD

What am I going
told by my doctor
terminal cancer
for another 3
going to do the



to do now if I'm
that I have
and can only live
months? Am I
same thing

that I'm doing now? Is there a
better way of living?

CHANGING A RELIGIOUS LABEL BEFORE DEATH

-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

Merely to believe that there is someone to wash away our sins without suppressing our evil state of mind, is not in accordance with the Teachings of the Buddha.

Very often we come across cases of people who change their religion at the last moment when they are about to die. By embracing another religion, some people are under the mistaken belief that they can 'wash away their sins' and gain an easy passage to heaven. They also hope to ensure themselves a more emotionally charged and aesthetically more attractive burial. For people who have been living a whole life time with a particular religion, to suddenly embrace a religion which is totally new and unfamiliar and to expect an immediate salvation through their new faith is indeed very far-fetched. This is only a dream. Some people are even known to have been converted into another faith when they are in a state of unconsciousness and in some cases, even posthumously. Those who are over zealous and crazy about converting others into their faith, have misled uneducated people into believing that theirs is the

one and only faith with an easy method or short-cut to heaven. If people are led to believe that there is someone sitting somewhere up there who can wash away all the sins committed during a lifetime, then this belief will only encourage others to commit evil without fear.

According to the Teachings of the Buddha there is no such belief that there is someone who can wash away sins. It is only when people sincerely realise that what they are doing is wrong and after having realised this, try to mend their ways and do good that they can suppress or counter the bad reactions that would accrue to them for the evil they had committed.



It has become a common sight in many hospitals to see purveyors of some religions hovering around the patients promising them 'life after death'. This is exploiting the basic ignorance and psychological fear of the patients. If they really want to help, then they must be able to work the 'miracles' they so proudly claim lies in their holy books. If they can work miracles, we will not need hospitals and cemeteries. Buddhists must never become victims to these people. They must learn the basic teachings of their noble religion which tell them that all suffering is the basic lot of mankind. The only way to end suffering is by purifying the mind. The individual creates his or her own suffering and it is that person alone who can end it. One cannot hope to eradicate the consequences of one's evil actions simply by changing one's religious label at the doorstep of death.

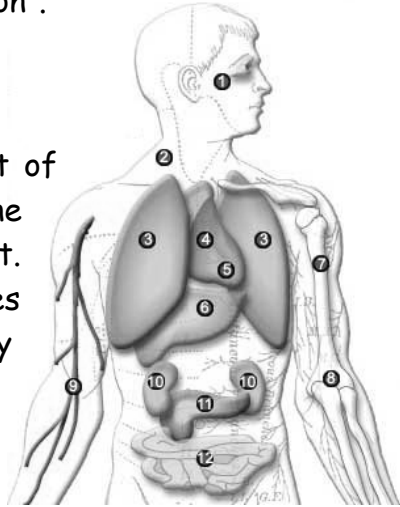
A dying person's destiny in the next life depends on the last thoughts which appear according to the good and bad karma accumulated during the current lifetime, irrespective of what type of religious label a person prefers to display at the last moment.

A GUIDE TO BUDDHISM & ORGAN DONATION

Adapted from a UK transplant brochure,
"Buddhism & Organ Donation".

What is organ donation?

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone else who needs a transplant. Hundreds of people's lives are saved each year by organ transplants. Organs that can be donated by people who have died include the heart, lungs,



kidneys, liver, pancreas and small bowel. Tissue such as skin, bone, heart valves and corneas can also be used to help others.

When can organ donation take place?

Doctors and nurses are committed to doing everything possible to save life. Organs are only removed for transplantation once all attempts to save

life have failed and after death has been certified by a doctor or doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Most donated organs come from people who die from a severe brain injury and who receive treatment on a ventilator in an intensive care unit. The brain injury damages vital centers in the brain stem which are essential to maintain life. No one can live once these centers have been destroyed. Tests can show conclusively when this has happened.

In some circumstances, patients who die in hospital but are not on a ventilator may also donate. They are called non-heart beating donors. Sometimes people who do not die in hospital can become tissue donors.

Consent?

The consent or lack of objection, of those closest to the patient is always sought before organs can be donated. This is why it is so important for people to discuss their wishes with their loved ones. Donation is an individual choice and views differ even within the same religious groups. Many families who agree to organ donation have said that it helps to know some good has come from their loss.

Care and respect?

The removal of organs is carried out with the greatest care and respect. The family can see the body afterwards and staff can contact a Buddhist monk or local religious leader if the family wishes.

Buddhism and organ donation?

Helping others is central to Buddhism along with the belief that charity forms an integral part of a spiritual way of life. There are examples in Buddhist scripture of the compassion shown by Buddha in giving his life and body to help others. The Sutra of Golden Light, chapter 18, shows how Buddha gave his body to save a starving tigress and her cubs, who were later reborn as his disciples. Human life, like everything else, is impermanent. It may be considered an act of compassion to enable another person to continue to live. For many Buddhists the most important consideration regarding death is the state of mind as this will influence the rebirth.

"ORGAN DONATION IS AN EXTREMELY POSITIVE ACTION. AS LONG AS IT IS TRULY THE WISH OF THE DYING PERSON, IT WILL NOT HARM IN ANY WAY THE CONSCIOUSNESS THAT

IS LEAVING THE BODY. ON THE CONTRARY, THIS FINAL ACT OF GENEROSITY ACCUMULATES GOOD KARMA."

-Sogyal Rinpoche, The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying-



There are many different Buddhist traditions and organ donation is an individual choice:

"I WOULD BE HAPPY IF I WAS ABLE TO HELP SOMEONE ELSE LIVE AFTER MY OWN DEATH."

-Dhammarati, Western Buddhist Order-



"NON-ATTACHMENT TO THE BODY CAN BE SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF NON-ATTACHMENT TO SELF AND BUDDHIST TEACHINGS ON IMPERMANENCE. COMPASSION IS A PRE-EMINENT QUALITY. GIVING ONE'S BODY FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS IS SEEN AS A VIRTUE."

-The Amida Trust-



SUPPORT ORGAN & TISSUE DONATION TO



"ORGAN DONATION IS ACCEPTABLE IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM. IT IS A BUDDHIST VIRTUE TO GENEROUSLY EXTEND HELP TO OTHER SENTIENT BEINGS AND THIS COVERS THE CASE OF ORGAN DONATION."

**-Phramaha Laow Panyasiri, Abbot, The
Buddhavihara Temple-**



"I ALWAYS CARRY MY DONOR CARD WITH ME"

-Paul Seto, Director, The Buddhist Society-



BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS HUMAN ORGAN DONATIONS

-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

From the Buddhist point of view, the donation of organs after one's death for the purpose of restoring the life of another human being clearly constitutes an act of charity which forms the basis or foundation of a spiritual or religious way of life.



Dana is the Pali term in Buddhism for charity or generosity. The perfection of this virtue consists of its practice in three ways, namely:

1. the giving or sharing of material things or worldly possessions
2. the offering of one's own bodily organs; and
3. the offering of one's services for a worthy cause to save the life even at the risk of sacrificing one's own life for the well being and happiness of others in need.

It is through such acts of charity that one is able to reduce one's own selfish motives from the mind and begin to develop and cultivate the great virtues of loving kindness, compassion and wisdom. The teaching of the Buddha is for the purpose of reducing suffering here and now, and to pave the way for the complete cessation of all forms of suffering. The fear to participate in a noble act such as that of organ donation lies primarily in a lack of understanding of the real nature of existence. There are some people who believe that when any part of their body or organ is removed, they will have to go without that organ in their next life or that they will not be eligible to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no rational basis to such ideas.

From the Buddhist point of view, death takes place when one's consciousness leaves the disintegrating material body. And, it is that relinking of consciousness, which determines one's next life. Some religionists may call this relinking consciousness a "soul", while others may call it "spirit" or "mental energy". Whatever term is use, it is clear that it has nothing to do with material components of the body which subject are subject to—and which return to their respective sources of energy. The earth

element returns to the soil; the water element returns to the streams, and the heat and elements return to the atmosphere. No matter how well the body is preserved, whether in a metal or wooden coffin, decomposition of the body is inevitable. It is only the consciousness, which goes on to the new rebirth.

Instead of allowing the organ to rot away and go to waste, today's technology and surgical methods have enabled their component structures such as the heart and other organs to be used or transplanted to restore life. With the ever-increasing number of organ failure occurring in the country, the time has come for our more understanding members of the public to come forward and volunteer to donate their organs after their death for a worthy cause.

It is the duty of all understanding people to join in this noble cause to help to alleviate suffering of humanity. Some time ago there was a car sticker which said, "LEAVE YOUR ORGANS BEHIND, GOD KNOWS THAT WE NEED THEM HERE".



THE BODHISATTA'S LIFE DONATION

The following is a story from the Vyaghri Jataka that illustrates how the Buddha in his past lives willingly and joyfully sacrifices his life for the good and happiness of the others. Well, we might not be as super-compassionate and generous as the Buddha. But, we can at least partially follow His foot steps by donating our organs upon death.



On one occasion when the Bodhisatta (one who aspires to become a Buddha) was passing through a forest, accompanied by his disciples, he saw a tigress and her three cubs near death from starvation. Moved to compassion, he asked his disciples to secure some food for them. This was but a pretext to send them away, for the Bodhisatta thought:

“Why should I search after meat from the body of another while the whole of my own body is available? Finding other meat is a matter of chance, and I may well lose the opportunity of doing my duty. This body being foul and a source of suffering, he is not wise

who would not rejoice as its being spent for the benefit of another. There are but two things that make one disregard the grief of another; attachment to one's own pleasure and the absence of the power of helping. But, I cannot take my pleasure while another grieves, as I am able to help him. Why should I, therefore be indifferent?"

"By casting myself down this precipice, I sacrifice my miserable body which will feed the tigress, thus preventing her from killing the young ones and saving the young ones from dying by the teeth of their mother."

"Furthermore, by doing so, I set an example to those whose longings are for the good of the world. I encourage the feeble, I gladden those who understand the meaning of charity and I inspire the virtuous. And finally that opportunity I yearned for, when may I have the opportunity of benefiting others by offering them my own limbs, I shall obtain it now, and acquire before long the Samma Sambuddhahood, the Supreme Enlightenment."

Thinking thus, he cast himself down the precipice sacrificing his life for the welfare of those helpless beings.

STEP INTO THE GATE OF MEDICINE

-Translated by Jo Chen-

The following are excerpts from stories by students of the Tzu Chi College of Medicine. Their first experiences in the anatomy lab made them feel agitated, frustrated and appreciative. The body donors not only silently guided them into the mysteries of the human body, but showed them the impermanence of life and the beauty of death. This heart-touching moment may become one of their most precious, unforgettable memories.

DYING WITH DIGNITY

By Lai Kun-cheng,

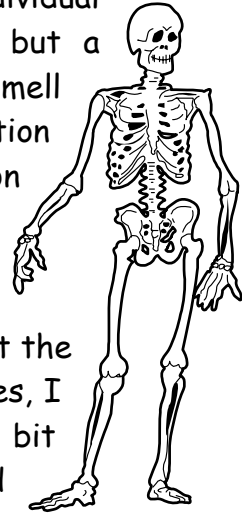
Anatomy Department Instructor



Knowing that I teach anatomy at the Tzu Chi College of Medicine, many friends ask me, "How many dead bodies have you done?" "Isn't it terrifying?" "Have you ever had some eerie experience?"

Generally speaking, normal people are scared of cadavers, not to mention the ghastly experience of cutting them up. I remember my first class in the

gross anatomy lab: I took a knife and carefully, respectfully dismembered the cadaver, which had the same body structures as mine. However, this respectful attitude didn't last long. Just a few weeks later, my teammates and I started to complain about this clumsy job and to tease the thick fat of the cadaver. To me, it was no longer an individual human that deserved our respect, but a learning tool. Moreover, the pungent smell of formalin and the sense of frustration at failing to find an organ as shown on the charts made me feel contempt for the body.



At the end of the semester, looking at the scattered organs and fat of the bodies, I asked myself if I had showed even a bit of respect for them, or if I would donate my own body for medical students to dissect into pieces. The answer was definitely negative. I expected to be treated like a human being even when I was dead, but I did not see that on the dissection table.

I admit that in the anatomy lab, I gained a lot of knowledge which could never be learned through studying textbooks. I also believed those body donors deserved our admiration. However, I just couldn't

convince myself to join them. I had very mixed emotions. Why? Because I felt it was something meaningful to donate our bodies for medical research, but on the other hand I thought it would be embarrassing to be dissected by students while lying naked on a table. (I bet lots of people out there feel the same way as I did.)

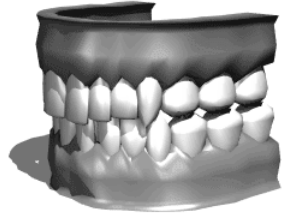
But since I joined Tzu Chi a year ago, I have changed. Inspired by Master Cheng Yen, who brought the Buddhist teachings to life, and influenced by the rich humanitarian spirit of Tzu Chi people, I got rid of my contradictory thoughts and now feel much more at ease. The Master says, "Our life is impermanent, but the life of wisdom is everlasting." Our life is fragile, indeed. We respect someone not because of how long he lives, but for how much he contributes to the world.

Those donors made use of their bodies to teach students something they could never learn from books. They won their dignity and respect. To me, it is the life of wisdom which will benefit all people, generation after generation. Hence, I no longer reject the idea of donating my body, and I hope more people will follow me to help enhance the quality of medical education.

THE TIGER GATE

By Juan Shao-chiu

The entrance of the gross anatomy lab was like the Tiger Gate between the front and back stages in Cantonese opera. Once I set foot into the lab, I had to set all my emotions aside and start to play the role of a good medical student. Was I afraid? Absolutely! I had never seen



dead bodies. I started to bargain: "Can I just look at the rest of the body except for that symbol of the soul, his face?"

I knew it wouldn't work. At the moment the white cloths covering the body were unwrapped, my muscles, blood vessels and nerves all tightened up. I held my breath and took a quick glimpse at my "teacher."

To my surprise, I saw such a peaceful face! He seemed in deep sleep, tranquil and restful. I was profoundly touched by the beauty and dignity of death. My fear gradually melted and the cool lab felt warmer.

Outside the lab, I could be very sentimental and cry at the end of any life. However once inside the lab, I

had to be tough and cool in order to cut and dissect the body, because later I would be responsible for helping people relieve their physical pain. Looking back, I felt fulfilled and delighted. I wanted to tell him, "I will remember your gracious look forever. Many thanks to you."

HUMANITARIANISM VS. MATERIALISM

By Chen Mei-yin

I used to avoid anything related to death. So, from the first day in medical college, I worried about the anatomy class.

The moment eventually came. Fortunately, the nuns from the Abode of Still Thoughts led us in chanting "Amitabha" before the class began, and that helped calm us down. However, as I unzipped the body bag, I was so indescribably apprehensive. What did a person look like after he died? What kind of person was he before he died? And what right did I have to dissect him?

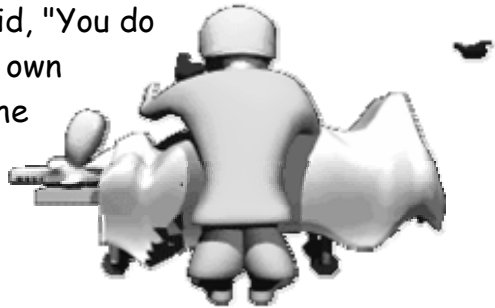
I touched his frozen body and the temperature showed the distinction between us-I was alive and he was dead. Perhaps I was just not ready yet. I had felt so sympathetic when I dissected frogs or mice. How much more uneasy I felt at dissecting a human being!

I wondered what he had been like, what he had done and where his family was now. The more I humanized him, the less I could cut into the body. After all, he was a human being. I thought he deserved respect even after his death. He shouldn't be "materialized," turned into a thing to be used.

Every four students shared a cadaver, so we couldn't let up on ourselves. Though exhausted, I felt that I had to learn every little thing. If I ignorantly cut even a tiny nerve some day, it might affect a patient's life.

Master Cheng Yen said, "You do not have the right to own your body, but only the right to use it."

Those donors transformed their wrecked bodies into something useful. I think the greatest repayment I can give to the donors is to study hard and become a conscientious doctor.



A TREMBLING BEGINNING

By Chen Chun-ting

The demarcation line between life and death is so thin that we can easily go across it. But it is a journey of

no return. We can never get those people back once they go. With the removal of skin layer by layer, I could see the yellowish fat. Holding the scalpel in my hand, I asked myself: if this were a living man tottering on that line between life and death, would I be able to pull him back to this side?

The class was over. It was getting dark outside the lab and the distant mountains were covered with mist. I took one more glance at the lab. Everything was so unforgettable, especially "him."

Recalling the hard work we had done in the lab, we wouldn't have been so impressed by the structures of the human body unless we had seen them. Learning from our mistakes in our experiments, we strove to reach a goal of zero mistakes. Those body donors have not only benefited us small potatoes in the field of medicine, but our future patients as well.

A THRILL I WILL NEVER FORGET

By Li Kuo-hsien

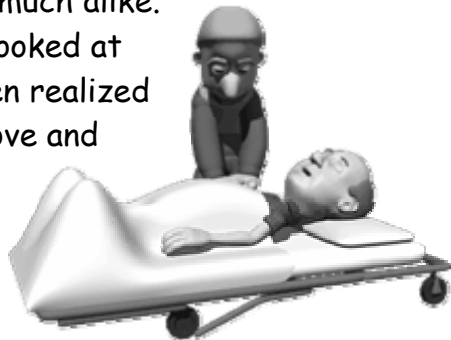
On the first day of class, dressed in white robes, we all stood behind the nuns who were chanting "Amitabha" in time with the tapping of a wooden drum echoing in the classroom. I held a sheet of paper with

a Buddhist scripture on it, but my brain was completely blank.

Though I was agitated at first, I soon got used to everything in the lab, opening the box, unwrapping the white cloths that covered the body... I don't remember when I started to treat him as an experimental item. I consoled myself that in the lab, I had to be fairly unemotional, and so I forgave my lack of concern.

That afternoon when we were preparing to disclose the head, I carelessly cut off a blood vessel beneath the scalp, and the frozen blood clots slowly oozed out. I couldn't stand my ignorance any more. I dropped the knife and fell onto the chair, feeling totally wretched.

For the first time I looked at his face closely, and I noticed that we were so much alike. My heart ached when I looked at his dissected body. I then realized it indeed needed great love and courage to donate one's body. He was as great as a bodhisattva, willing to give even his body.



SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

By Tsai En-lin

The medical students had a group of "teachers" who remained silent all the time, but who used themselves as real-life experiments to drill medical knowledge into the students.

When I started dissecting the body, I felt the pain he suffered as if he had become part of my life. I thought a physician had to be sensitive yet rational, turning emotions and apprehensions into knowledge.

I imagined that he used to be like us, with feelings of happiness and sadness. When he died, he must have been surrounded by his family. Now it was a group of strangers standing around him. Thinking of this inexplicable relationship between us, the feelings of gratitude and respect toward him grew ever more solid. He was a bodhisattva, turning his worldly body into knowledge which was engraved firmly in our minds so that we could save more patients.

Although we never heard him lecture, we did sense his great expectation: that we would become accomplished, dedicated doctors.



A TOUGH JOB

By Wang Po-han

After the Buddhist ceremony commemorating the body donors, all the living people were gone, leaving us behind with dead people in exquisite iron boxes. When the advisor called "Go," everyone immediately started to remove the wrappings, and in a moment the cadavers were all exposed.

The white wrappings scared me. It was "her." The other three teammates and I started to make marks on her chest, like toddlers holding a big pen and trying to draw a straight line on a piece of wrinkled paper. Two weeks later, I took the dissection work as routine, forgetting all fear or even respect for the dead.

In order to keep up with the schedule, I worked carelessly and I often cut off vessels and nerves. At first I thought it was no big deal. However, the more mistakes I made, the less I could control my temper. A thought went across my mind: she was not a disposable commercial item, but an instructor who wanted to help me acquire enough knowledge to save my future patients' lives. I lost my confidence to carry on.

Three things happened that made me think thoroughly about the meaning of body donation. First, a couple of close calls on my motorcycle made me aware that I could join her at any moment. Then one day, when I turned her around, her hair floated loosely in the preservative solution. I suddenly realized that I might possibly have met this person before. Third, I felt furious when I heard someone talk disrespectfully about a body.

I no longer pay my gratitude and respect to the people who gave their bodies just because my instructors told me to. Now I truly feel it in the depth of my heart.

THE TORCH OF LIFE PASSES ON

By Chang En-ting

When we first made our acquaintance, he was lying tranquilly on the table. I could sense that under the khaki skin was a spirit of true love. Yet although he used his body to show me complicated body structures, I only repaid him by breathing on his undisturbed face as I leaned down to work. I don't remember how many afternoons I rummaged inside his body with medical tools,



almost forgetting that he was once a person.

Exhausted after an evening in the lab, I walked through the dark night back to the empty dorm. In the shower, gazing at my naked body, I reflected that there were many people who were once as young as I and who were loved by their families. But when their lives were about to vanish, they chose to make them shine by putting their bodies in our hands. With the end of this life, many doctors-to-be can obtain fundamental medical knowledge which will help save numerous other lives.

He was not simply an anatomy "advisor," but he also instructed me to delve into the mysteries of living and dying. Moreover, his devoted religious spirit inspired in me the true value of life. It is my responsibility to spread his seeds of enthusiasm and love everywhere.

HEART OF GRATITUDE

By Tu Yi-hsun

The first day of class was my birthday. That day I gave thanks to my parents for giving me life twenty-one years ago, and at the same time I experienced the true meaning of life-continuous giving and sacrifice.

In the anatomy class, I pretended to be highly interested and concerned. However, inside my heart, I wondered why we came into this world. Why should one be a good doctor? As soon as the wrappings were removed, I saw the answers in the body's peaceful expressions of kindness, compassion, joy and unselfish giving.

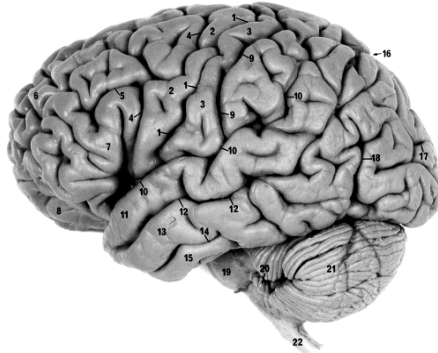
Looking through the lab windows at the statue of the Earth Treasury Bodhisattva, I had an unexplainable feeling of belonging, calm and peaceful. On some lonely nights when I was totally fatigued by the hard work, those people who had given themselves always reminded me that it was worth it all as long as I was able to serve patients in the future.

At the end of the class, I felt we had become old friends and that they had given me so much. All I can do to repay them is to carry their great love to all human beings.



MAY THIS BODY OF MINE BE A SOURCE
OF KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM TO OTHERS
IN ORDER THAT MANY ARE MORE SKILLFUL IN
HEALING AND BRINGING HAPPINESS
TO HUMANITY!

BRAIN DEATH, VEGETATIVE STATE, COMA & EUTHANASIA



What is DEATH from a MEDICAL point of view?

Most people believe death occurs when a person's heartbeat and breathing stop. This is called "cardiac death." But, medically and legally, death occurs when the entire brain stops working. This is called "brain death."

What is BRAIN DEATH?

When someone is brain dead, it means that there is no blood flow or oxygen to their brain and that their brain including the brain stem is no longer functioning in any capacity and never will again. One must understand that everyone dies of brain death. Whether an old person suffers cardiac arrest/death

resulting in the lack of oxygen and nutrients to the brain, or a younger person suffers a gunshot wound to the head resulting in brain death. Both are still brain death.

The brain can survive for up to about six minutes after the heart stops. The reason to learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is that if CPR is started within six minutes of cardiac arrest, the brain may survive the lack of oxygen. After about six minutes without CPR, however, the brain begins to die.

When a person is brain dead, can the heart still beats?

The diagnosis of "brain death" is only possible because of modern medicine's ability to maintain the functions of supporting organs of the body after the brain is no longer viable. When a person is brain dead, it does not mean that other organs such as the heart, lungs, kidneys or liver are dead although they may function for only a few days without life supporting systems.

If breathing and heartbeat are maintained by machines and medications, a brain dead person will appear to be alive. The person's skin may be warm, the chest will rise and fall in a breathing motion and a

heartbeat is seen on a monitor. But, if there is no brain activity as recorded by an electroencephalograph (EEG), the person is brain dead and therefore medically and legally dead.

Would removing life supporting system like a ventilator be the same as causing the death of my family member or not giving him/her all possible chances?

Once a patient is brain dead, he or she is already dead. The brain will never recover. Since the patient is already dead, you cannot kill him or her by removing respiratory support. The respiratory support equipment only keeps the lungs moving and heart beating, which gives the appearance that a person is still living.

YOU SHOULD NOT TELL THE FAMILY MEMBERS OF A
BRAIN DEATH PATIENT THAT YOU ARE GOING TO SWITCH
OFF THE LIFE SUPPORTING SYSTEM! IT SHOULD BE
SWITCHING OFF THE DEATH SUPPORTING SYSTEM!

-Professor Emeritus Datuk Dr. Alex Delikan-

Are there any clinically documented cases where a patient was declared brain dead and later restored to a normal life?

NO. When you hear about people who were brain dead and later recovered, these people were not actually brain dead! They were in a deep coma or vegetative state with slight brain activity.

What is the difference between BRAIN DEATH, COMA and VEGETATIVE STATE?

Patients who suffer brain death are not in coma. Patients in coma may or may not progress to brain death. Patients in coma may be in deep coma or may survive in what is termed a "vegetative state." The difference between these two groups is that a deep coma patient usually requires hospital care, while a patient in a vegetative state is better and may be released to the family for home care. In either case, the patient is medically and legally considered to be alive with neurological signs and brain activities though may be diminished.

How do we tell that a person is brain dead?

The positive examinations for brain death include the following:

- *The pupils stay in mid-position and do not react to light.*
- *The eyes do not blink when touched (corneal reflex).*

- *The eyes do not rotate in the socket when the head is moved from side to side or up and down (oculo-cephalic reflex).*
- *The eyes do not move when ice water is placed in the ear canal (oculo-vestibular reflex).*
- *The patient does not cough or gag when a suction tube is placed deep into the breathing tube.*
- *The patient does not breathe when taken off the ventilator.*

If clinical examination is equivocal, confirmatory tests may be done. These could include either an electroencephalography (EEG) or blood flow study to demonstrate that the brain is actually no longer functioning.

What is death from a Buddhist point of view?

According to Buddhism, life is a combination of mind/mental force (nama) and matter/physical body (rupa). Mind consists of the consciousness, perceptions, sensations and volitional activities. Matter consists of the four great elements of solidity, fluidity, motion and heat. Death is defined as a separation of mind and matter.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, death is a process with 8 cycles with corresponding internal and external signs. It is in the 4th cycle that breathing actually ceases but death process is not completed yet. There

are five signs to indicate consciousness leaving the body and therefore the completion of the death process:

1. Loss of warmth from the heart centre in the middle of the chest.

2. Body starts to smell or decompose.

3. One or more drops of red or white fluid leaving the nose or sexual organs.

4. A subtle awareness that the consciousness has left and the body has become like an empty shell.

5. Body slumping forward (in the case of a meditator who has been sitting in meditation after the breath has stopped).

What is the implication of brain death from a Buddhist point of view?

Nobody can be 100% sure whether death process from a Buddhist point of view is actually completed in brain death. But, we know for sure that brain death is irreversible and the death process will eventually be completed. So, we are not breaking the first precept of harming or killing sentient beings if we withhold

the life supporting systems of a loved one who is brain dead. We are just allowing death to occur naturally which is encouraged in Buddhism. By doing this, we can even cultivating compassion by allowing the intensive care unit (ICU) bed to be given to those who will better benefit from it.

Another important implication is that we can generously donate our organs to others if we are brain dead, since we know that we will 'surely die'/already dead if diagnosed with it. Why not make full use of the organs for the happiness of others. After all, we get a whole new set of it in the next life. It is believed that if the body is disposed off before the end of death process whereby the consciousness leaves the body, this will be very disturbing for the person who is going through the final stages of psychological death.

How about organ donation? The usual answer given by the Tibetan lamas to this question is that if the wish to donate one's organs is done with motivation of compassion, then any



disturbances to the death process that this causes is far outweighed by the positive karma that one is creating by this act of giving.

However, the situation is different if a person is in a deep coma or vegetative state because medically, legally and also from a Buddhist point of view they are not dead and there is a chance of regaining consciousness especially in the early phase. So, it is not advisable to remove life supporting systems from a person in deep coma or vegetative state.

What is Euthanasia?

Euthanasia is medically defined as a deliberate intervention undertaken with the intention of ending a life so as to relieve intractable suffering (House of Lords 1994, Walton's 1995). This definition is a rather general one. It can be done voluntarily with the dying patient's request/consent or involuntarily out of mercy. It may be done with the assistance from someone e.g. doctor or a family member or by patient himself/herself (suicide). In October, 1987, the World Medical Association declared that euthanasia is medically unethical. Having said that, there are a few countries in the world e.g. Netherlands that legalize euthanasia but with very strict criteria i.e. must be voluntary, terminal illness,

performed by a physician, assessed by a Psychiatrist etc.

It is important to note that avoiding life sustaining treatment (any medical treatment that serves to prolong life without reversing the underlying medical condition e.g. mechanical ventilation, renal dialysis, blood transfusions, chemotherapy, artificial nutrition) to avoid artificial prolongation of life is NOT euthanasia from a medical point of view. The same goes for withdrawal of life supporting systems in a brain dead person.

What is the Buddhist view on Euthanasia?

This will depend a lot on what is the exact definition of euthanasia in this context. It is definitely acceptable if it is mis-referred to what has been described in the preceding paragraph as in avoiding life sustaining treatment and brain dead which are basically allowing death to occur naturally.

What about a 'typical-strictly-defined euthanasia' - a patient with terminal illness, with a lot of intolerable physical and mental suffering requesting a doctor to give him/her medications to speed up death with the intention to reduce suffering to self and burden to family members?

From a Buddhist point of view, this is not encouraged, as a living being has the results of its own past karma to work out and any interference with the situation will not be anything more than a temporary relief of the suffering it is bound to endure. It is also in a way a subtle form of suicide which is again not encouraged in Buddhism.

Euthanasia is actually a word derived from two Greek words: *eu* meaning good and *thanatos* meaning death. Put together, it means good death. Well, there are so many other ways that we can help a person to die peacefully rather than by euthanasia. We should concentrate our effort to reduce the physical, mental, social and spiritual suffering through effective palliative care e.g. anesthetic service, counseling, social and spiritual support etc. rather than through narrow-minded illusory relief by euthanasia. Bear in mind that a lot of people who say, "Let me die!" are actually deep inside the heart harboring the thoughts of, "PLEASE GIVE ME A REASON TO LIVE - I DON'T WANT TO DIE!".



BUDDHIST FUNERAL RITES

-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

Proper Buddhist funeral practices are simple, solemn and dignified religious services.

As practiced in many Buddhist countries, a Buddhist funeral is a simple, solemn and dignified service. Unfortunately, some people have included many unnecessary, extraneous items and superstitious practices into the funeral rites. The extraneous items and practices vary according to the traditions and customs of the people. Rituals were introduced in the past by people who could not understand the nature of life, nature of death, and what life would be after death. When such ideas were incorporated as so-called Buddhist practices, critics tended to condemn Buddhism for expensive and meaningless funeral rites. If they approach proper persons who have studied the real Teachings of the Buddha and Buddhist tradition, they could receive advice on how to perform Buddhist funeral rites in the correct manner. It is most unfortunate that a bad impression has been created that Buddhism encourages people to waste



their money and time on unnecessary rites and rituals. It must be clearly understood that Buddhism has nothing to do with such debased practices.

Buddhists are not very particular regarding the burial or cremation of a dead body. In many Buddhist countries, cremation is customary. For hygienic and economic reasons, it is advisable to cremate. Today, the population in the world is increasing and if we continue to have dead bodies occupying valuable land, then one day all remaining available land will be occupied by the dead and the living will have no place to live.

There are still some people who object to the cremation of dead bodies. They say that cremation is against God's law, in the same way they have objected to many other things in the past. It will take some time for such people to understand that cremation is much more appropriate and convenient than burial.

Besides, Buddhists do not believe that one day someone will come and awaken the departed persons' spirits from their graveyards or give life to the ashes from their urns and decide who should go to heaven and who should go to hell.

The consciousness or mental energy of the departed person has no connection with the body left behind or his or her skeleton or ashes. A dead body is simply the rotten old empty house which the departed person's life occupied. The Buddha called it 'a useless log'. Many people believe that if the deceased is not given a proper burial or if a sanctified tombstone is not placed on the grave, then the soul of the deceased will wander to the four corners of the world and weep and wail and sometimes even return to disturb the relatives. Such a belief cannot be found anywhere in Buddhism.

Some people believe that if the dead body or the ashes of the departed person is buried or enshrined in a particular place by spending a big amount of money, the departed person will be benefited. If we really want to honour a departed person, we must do some meritorious deeds such as giving some donations to deserving cases and charitable or religious activities in memory of the departed ones, and not by performing expensive rites and rituals.

Buddhists believe that when a person dies, rebirth will take place somewhere else according to his or her good or bad actions. As long as a person possesses the craving for existence, that person must experience

rebirth. Only the Arahants, who have gone beyond all passions will have no more rebirths and so after their death, they will attain their final goal Nirvana.*



How do you want your funeral to be?

FUNERAL REFLECTION

Suppose three people (A good friend, a close family member and a priest from the temple that you regularly attend) are invited to your funeral for your eulogy, what would you want them to say about you?

Start living your life as you would like them to say about you upon your death!

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE ON REBIRTH

One of the ways to deal with grief is to reflect on Rebirth, "Life never dies. He/she will be reborn again and have a whole new life". This reflection is of course in accordance with fundamental Buddhist belief. I hereby would like to further support this belief with



scientific evidence, so that we can reflect on it with greater confidence. The leading authority in scientific research on rebirth is Professor Dr. Ian Stevenson.

Ian Stevenson is the former head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, and now is the Director of the Division of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia. He has devoted the last 40 years to the scientific documentation of past life memories of children from all over the world and has over 3000 cases in his files. Many people, including skeptics and scholars, agree that these cases offer the best evidence yet for reincarnation.

EITHER DR. STEVENSON IS MAKING A
COLOSSAL MISTAKE, OR HE WILL BE KNOWN AS
THE GALILEO OF THE 20TH CENTURY."

-Dr Harold Lief-
(Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease)

Dr. Stevenson's research into the possibility of reincarnation began in 1960 when he heard of a case in Sri Lanka where a child claimed to remember a past life. He thoroughly questioned the child and the child's parents, as well as the people whom the child claimed were his parents from his past life. This led to Dr. Stevenson's conviction that reincarnation was possibly a reality.

The more cases he pursued, the greater became his drive to scientifically open up and conquer an unknown territory among the world's mysteries, which until now had been excluded from scientific observation. Nonetheless, he believed he could approach and possibly furnish proof of its reality with scientific means.

In 1960, Dr. Stevenson published two articles in the Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research about children who remembered past lives. In 1974, he published his book, *Twenty Cases*

Suggestive of Reincarnation, and became well known wherever this book appeared by those people who already had a long-standing interest in this subject. They were pleased to finally be presented with such fundamental research into reincarnation from a scientific source.

In 35% of cases he investigated, children who died an unnatural death developed phobias. For example, if they had drowned in a past life, then they frequently developed a phobia about going out of their depth in water. If they had been shot, they were often afraid of guns and sometimes loud bangs in general. If they died in a road accident, they would sometimes develop a phobia of traveling in cars, buses or lorries.

Another frequently observed unusual form of behavior, which Dr. Stevenson called phobias, concerns children who express the wish to eat different kinds of food or to wear clothes that were different from those of their culture. If a child had developed an alcohol, tobacco or drug addiction as an adult in a previous incarnation he may express a need for these substances and develop cravings at an early age.



Many of these children with past-life memories show abilities or talents that they had in their previous lives. Often children who were members of the opposite sex in their previous life show difficulty in adjusting to the new sex. These problems relating to the 'sex change' can lead to homosexuality later on in their lives. Former girls who were reborn as boys may wish to dress as girls or prefer to play with girls rather than boys.

Until now all these human oddities have been a mystery to conventional psychiatrists - after all, the parents could not be blamed for their children's behavior in these cases. At long last research into reincarnation is shedding some light

on the subject. In the past, doctors blamed such peculiarities on a lack or a surplus of certain hormones, but now they will have to do some rethinking.



DEATH IS JUST A TEMPORARY END
TO A TEMPORARY EXISTENCE

-Buddha-

THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF HEAVEN AND HELL

-Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda-

Wise people make their own heaven while foolish people create their own hell here and hereafter.

The Buddhist concept of heaven and hell is entirely different from that in other religions. Buddhists do not accept that these places are eternal. It is unreasonable to condemn a person to eternal hell for his or her human weakness but quite reasonable to give a person every chance to develop him or herself. From the Buddhist point of view, those who go to hell can work themselves upwards by making use of the merit that they had acquired previously. There are no locks on the gates of hell. Hell is a temporary place and there is no reason for those beings to suffer there forever.



The Buddha's Teaching shows us that there are heavens and hells not only beyond this world, but in this very world itself. Thus the Buddhist conception of heaven and hell is very reasonable. For instance,

the Buddha once said, "When the average ignorant person makes an assertion to the effect that there is a Hell (patala) under the ocean he is making a statement which is false and without basis. The word 'Hell' is a term for painful sensations." The idea of one particular ready-made place or a place created by god as heaven and hell is not acceptable to the Buddhist concept.

The fire of hell in this world is hotter than that of any possible hell in the world-beyond. There is no fire equal to anger, lust or greed and ignorance. According to the Buddha, we are burning from eleven kinds of physical pain and mental agony: lust, hatred, illusion, sickness, decay, death, worry, lamentation, pain (physical and mental), melancholy and grief. People can burn the entire world with some of these fires of mental discord. From a Buddhist point of view, the easiest way to define hell and heaven is that wherever there is more suffering, either in this world or any other planes of existence, that place is a hell to those who suffer. And where there is more pleasure or happiness, either in this world or any other plane of existence, that place is a heaven to those who enjoy their worldly life in that particular place. However, as the human realm is a mixture of both pain and happiness, human beings experience both pain and

happiness and will be able to realise the real nature of life. But in many other planes of existence inhabitants have less chance for this realisation. In certain places there is more suffering than pleasure while in some other places there is more pleasure than suffering.

Buddhists believe that after death rebirth can take place in any one of a number of possible existences. This future existence is conditioned by the last thought-moment a person experiences at the point of death. This last thought which determines the next existence results from the past actions of a man either in this life or before that. Hence, if the predominant thought reflects meritorious action, then he or she will find the future existence in a happy state. But that state is temporary and when it is exhausted a new life must begin all over again, determined by another dominating 'karmic' energy which lies dormant in the subconscious mind, waiting for the right conditions to become active. This is very much like a seed waiting for rain and sunshine to sprout. This repetitious process goes on endlessly unless one arrives at 'Right View' and makes a firm resolve to follow the Noble Path which produces the ultimate happiness of Nirvana. Heaven is a temporary place where those who have done good deeds experience more sensual pleasures for a longer period.

Hell is another temporary place where those evil doers experience more physical and mental suffering. It is not justifiable to believe that such places are permanent. There is no god behind the scene of heaven and hell. Each and every person experiences pain or pleasure according to good and bad karma. Buddhists never try to introduce Buddhism by frightening people through hell-fire or enticing people by pointing to paradise. Their main purpose is character building and mental training. Buddhists can practice their religion without aiming at heaven or without developing fear of hell. Their duty is to lead righteous lives by upholding humane qualities and peace of mind.



HAPPINESS IS A SPACE BETWEEN TWO
SUFFERING & SUFFERING IS A SPACE
BETWEEN TWO HAPPINESS

-Ajahn Brahmavamso-

DEDICATION OF MERITS TO THE DEPARTED ONES AS SKILLFUL BEREAVEMENT

Life is uncertain, death is certain! Though we all may intellectually know this, we might not be able to accept the death of a loved one at the emotional level. A lot of people suffer from negative emotions e.g. guilt when a loved one passes away e.g. a son in overseas might feel guilty for not been able to be with his mother at the point of death. Excessive guilt or any other negative emotions is not healthy during bereavement. One of the ways to deal with such pathological emotion is to find a way for the living ones to get connected to the departed ones.

From a Buddhist perspective, one of such ways to connect ourselves to the departed ones is by dedication of our merits accrued through our wholesome actions to them. It is believed that by doing so, we can help them to achieve a more favourable birth if they are reborn in woeful states.



Therefore, it is a common practice among Buddhist to invite monks for dana (alms giving) after the death of

a loved one. Before the commencement of a meritorious deed e.g. dana, whenever possible, it is good to make a formal invitation to the departed one:

"The late so-and-so, if you are aware that we are dedicating these merits to you, we now invite you to come and witness this act. May you benefit by appreciating and rejoicing in our dedication of merits".

It is hoped that by making such formal invitation, the departed can be aware of the relatives' offerings and the guardian devas there will allow him/her to come to witness the event and participate in the sharing of merits later.

After the meritorious deeds have been performed, then the dedication of merits can be performed by making a verbal announcement as follows:

"Today we have done the following meritorious deeds: List them out e.g. taking refuge in the Triple Gem, observing the Five Precepts, given dana to the Sangha, listened to the Dharma etc. We now offer a share of these merits especially to the late so-and-so".

This dedication of merits can act as powerful spiritual method for us to get connected to the departed ones and slowly let them go in peace. What a beautiful and skilful bereavement!



Hello! Thank you very much
for the spiritual food of merits!
Don't worry about me,
I'm now well, happy and RIP!

HOW THE BUDDHA DIED

-Venerable Dr. Mettanando-

During Wesak Day, we are informed that it is also the day Buddha attained Parinibbana. But, not many know how the Buddha died. Ancient texts weave two stories about the Lord Buddha's death. Was it planned and willed by the Buddha, or was it food poisoning, or something else altogether? Here's an account.....



The Mahaparinibbana Sutta, from the Long Discourse of Pali Tipitaka, is without doubt the most reliable source for details on the death of Siddhattha Gotama (BCE 563-483), the Lord Buddha. It is composed in a narrative style that allows readers to follow the story of the last days of the Buddha, beginning a few months before he died.

To understand what really happened to the Buddha is not a simple matter, though. The sutta, or discourse, paints two conflicting personalities of the Buddha, one overriding the other.

The first personality was that of a miracle worker who beamed himself and his entourage of monks across the Ganges River (D II, 89), who had a divine vision of the settlement of gods on earth (D II, 87), who could live until the end of the world on condition that someone invite him to do so (D II, 103), who determined the time of his own death (D II, 105), and whose death was glorified by the shower of heavenly flowers and sandal powder and divine music (D II, 138).

The other personality was that of an aged being who was failing in health (D II, 120), who almost lost his life because of a severe pain during his last retreat at Vesali (D II, 100), and who was forced to come to terms with his unexpected illness and death after consuming a special cuisine offered by his generous host.

These two personalities take turns emerging in different parts of the narrative. Moreover, there also appear to be two explanations of the Buddha's cause of death: One is that the Buddha died because his attendant, Ananda, failed to invite him to live on to the age of the world or even longer (D II, 117). The other is that he died by a sudden illness which began after he ate what is known as "Sukaramaddava" (D II, 127-157).

The former story was probably a legend, or the result of a political struggle within the Buddhist community during a stage of transition, whereas the latter sounds more realistic and accurate in describing a real life situation that happened in the Buddha's last days.

A number of studies have focused on the nature of the special cuisine that the Buddha ate during his last meal as being the agent of his death.

However, there is also another approach based on the description of the symptoms and signs given in the sutta, which modern medical knowledge can shed light on.



In another mural painting at Wat Ratchasittharam, the Lord Buddha is approaching death, but he still takes time to answer questions put forth by the ascetic Subhadda, his last convert who, after being admitted to the Buddhist Order, became an arahant (enlightened monk).

What we know

In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, we are told that the Buddha became ill suddenly after he ate a special delicacy, Sukaramaddava, literally translated as "soft pork", which had been prepared by his generous host,

Cunda Kammaraputta. The name of the cuisine has attracted the attention of many scholars, and it has been the focus of academic research on the nature of the meal or ingredients used in the cooking of this special dish.

The sutta itself provides details concerning the signs and symptoms of his illness in addition to some reliable information about his circumstances over the previous four months, and these details are also medically significant.

The sutta begins with King Ajatasattus' plot to conquer a rival state, Vajji. The Buddha had journeyed to Vajji to enter his last rainy-season retreat. It was during this retreat that he fell ill. The symptoms of the illness were sudden, severe pain.

However, the sutta provides no description of the location and character of his pain. It mentions his illness briefly, and says that the pain was intense, and almost killed him.

Subsequently, the Buddha was visited by Mara, the God of Death, who invited him to pass away. The Buddha did not accept the invitation right away. It was only after Ananda, his attendant, failed to recognise his hint for an invitation to remain that he

died. This piece of the message, though tied up with myth and supernaturalism, gives us some medically significant information. When the sutta was composed, its author was under the impression that the Buddha died, not because of the food he ate, but because he already had an underlying illness that was serious and acute and had the same symptoms of the disease that finally killed him.

The Timing

Theravada Buddhist tradition has adhered to the assumption that the historical Buddha passed away during the night of the full moon in the lunar month of Visakha (which falls sometime in May to June). But the timing contradicts information given in the sutta, which states clearly that the Buddha died soon after the rainy-season retreat, most likely during the autumn or mid-winter, that is, November to January.

A description of the miracle of the unseasonal blooming of leaves and flowers on the sala trees, when the Buddha was laid down between them, indicates the time frame given in the sutta.

Autumn and winter, however, are seasons that are not favourable for the growth of mushrooms, which some

scholars believe to be the source of the poison that the Buddha ate during his last meal.

Diagnosis

The sutta tells us that the Buddha felt ill immediately after eating the Sukaramaddava. Since we do not know anything about the nature of this food, it is difficult to name it as the direct cause of the Buddha's illness. But from the descriptions given, the onset of the illness was quick.



While eating, he felt there was something wrong with the food and he suggested his host have the food buried. Soon afterward, he suffered severe stomach pain and passed blood from his rectum.

We can reasonably assume that the illness started while he was having his meal, making him think there was something wrong with the unfamiliar delicacy. Out of his compassion for others, he had it buried.

Was food poisoning the cause of the illness? It seems unlikely. The symptoms described do not indicate food poisoning, which can be very acute, but would hardly cause diarrhoea with blood. Usually, food poisoning caused by bacteria does not manifest itself

immediately, but takes an incubation period of two to 12 hours to manifest itself, normally with acute diarrhoea and vomiting, but not the passage of blood.

Another possibility is chemical poisoning, which also has an immediate effect, but it is unusual for chemical poisoning to cause severe intestinal bleeding. Food poisoning with immediate intestinal bleeding could only have been caused by corrosive chemicals such as strong acids, which can easily lead to immediate illness. But corrosive chemicals should have caused bleeding in the upper intestinal tract, leading to vomiting blood. None of these severe signs are mentioned in the text.

Peptic ulcer diseases can be excluded from the list of possible illnesses as well. In spite of the fact that their onset is immediate, they are seldom accompanied by bloody stool. A gastric ulcer with intestinal bleeding produces black stool when the ulcer penetrates a blood vessel. An ulcer higher up in the digestive tract would be more likely to manifest itself as bloody vomiting, not a passage of blood through the rectum.

Other evidence against this possibility is that a patient with a large gastric ulcer usually does not have an appetite. By accepting the invitation for lunch

with the host, we can assume that the Buddha felt as healthy as any man in his early 80s would feel. Given his age we cannot rule out that the Buddha did not have a chronic disease, such as cancer or tuberculosis or a tropical infection such as dysentery or typhoid, which could have been quite common in the Buddha's time.

These diseases could produce bleeding of the lower intestine, depending on their location. They also agree with the history of his earlier illness during the retreat. But they can be ruled out, since they are usually accompanied by other symptoms, such as lethargy, loss of appetite, weight loss, growth or mass in the abdomen. None of these symptoms were mentioned in the sutta.

A large haemorrhoid can cause severe rectal bleeding, but it is unlikely that a haemorrhoid could cause severe abdominal pain unless it is strangulated. But then it would have greatly disturbed the walking of the Buddha to the house of his host, and rarely is haemorrhoid bleeding triggered by a meal.

Mesenteric infarction

A disease that matches the described symptoms-accompanied by acute abdominal pain and the passage

of blood, commonly found among elderly people, and triggered by a meal is mesenteric infarction, caused by an obstruction of the blood vessels of the mesentery. It is lethal. Acute mesenteric ischaemia (a reduction in the blood supply to the mesentery) is a grave condition with a high rate of mortality.

The mesentery is a part of the intestinal wall that binds the whole intestinal tract to the abdominal cavity. An infarction of the vessels of the mesentery normally causes the death of the tissue in a large section of the intestinal tract, which results in a laceration of the intestinal wall.

This normally produces severe pain in the abdomen and the passage of blood. The patient usually dies of acute blood loss. This condition matches the information given in the sutta. It is also confirmed later when the Buddha asked Ananda to fetch some water for him to drink, indicating intense thirst.

As the story goes, Ananda refused, as he saw no source for clean water. He argued with the Buddha that the nearby stream had been muddied by a large caravan of carts. But the Buddha insisted he fetch water anyway.

A question arises at this point: Why did the Buddha not go to the water himself, instead of pressing his unwilling attendant to do so? The answer is simple. The Buddha was suffering from shock caused by severe blood loss. He could no longer walk, and from then to his death bed he was most likely carried on a stretcher.

If this was indeed the situation, the sutta remains silent about the Buddha's traveling to his deathbed, possibly because the author felt that it would be an embarrassment for the Buddha. Geographically, we know that the distance between the place believed to be the house of Cunda and the place where the Buddha died was about 15 to 20 kilometres. It is not possible for a patient with such a grave illness to walk such a distance.

More likely, what happened was that the Buddha was carried on a stretcher by a group of monks to Kusinara (Kushinagara).

It remains a point of debate whether the Buddha really determined to pass away at this city, presumably not much larger than a town. From the direction of the Buddha's journey, given in the sutta, he was moving north from Rajagaha. It is possible that he did not intend to die there, but in the town

where he was born, which would have taken a period of three months to reach.

From the sutta, it is clear that the Buddha was not anticipating his sudden illness, or else he would not have accepted the invitation of his host. Kusinara was probably the nearest town where he could find a doctor to take care of him. It is not difficult to see a group of monks hurriedly carrying the Buddha on a stretcher to the nearest town to save his life.

Before passing away, the Buddha told Ananda that Cunda was not to be blamed and that his death was not caused by eating Sukaramaddava. The statement is significant. The meal was not the direct cause of his death. The Buddha knew that the symptom was a repeat of an experience he'd had a few months earlier, the one which had almost killed him.

Sukaramaddava, no matter the ingredients or how it was cooked, was not the direct cause of his sudden illness.

Progression of the disease

Mesenteric infarction is a disease commonly found among elderly people, caused by the obstruction of the main artery that supplies the middle section of

the bowel-the small intestine-with blood. The most common cause of the obstruction is the degeneration of the wall of the blood vessel, the superior mesenteric artery, causing severe abdominal pain, also known as abdominal angina.

Normally, the pain is triggered by a large meal, which requires a higher flow of blood to the digestive tract. As the obstruction persists, the bowel is deprived of its blood supply, which subsequently leads to an infarction, or gangrene, of a section of the intestinal tract. This in turn results in a laceration of the intestinal wall, profuse bleeding into the intestinal tract, and then bloody diarrhoea.

The disease gets worse as the liquid and content of the intestine oozes out into the peritoneal cavity, causing peritonitis or inflammation of the abdominal walls. This is already a lethal condition for the patient, who often dies due to the loss of blood and other fluid. If it is not corrected by surgery, the disease often progresses to septic shock due to bacterial toxins infiltrating the blood stream.

Retrospective analysis

From the diagnosis given above, we can be rather certain that the Buddha suffered from mesenteric

infarction caused by an occlusion of the superior mesenteric artery. This was the cause of the pain that almost killed him a few months earlier during his last rainy-season retreat.

With the progress of the illness, some of the mucosal lining of his intestine sloughed off, and this site became the origin of the bleeding. Arteriosclerosis, the hardening of the vessel wall caused by ageing, was the cause of the arterial occlusion, a small blockage that did not result in bloody diarrhoea, but is a symptom, also known to us as abdominal angina.

He had his second attack while he was eating the Sukaramaddava. The pain was probably not intense in the beginning, but made him feel that there was something wrong. Suspicious about the nature of the food, he asked his host to have it all buried, so that others might not suffer from it.

Soon, the Buddha realised that the illness was serious, with the passage of blood and more severe pain in his abdomen. Due to the loss of blood, he went into shock. The degree of dehydration was so severe that he could not maintain himself any longer and he had to take shelter at a tree along the way.

Feeling very thirsty and exhausted, he got Ananda to collect water for him to drink, even though he knew that the water was muddied. It was there that he collapsed until his entourage carried him to the nearest town, Kusinara, where there would have been a chance of finding a doctor or lodging for him to recover in.

It was probably true that the Buddha got better after drinking to replace his fluid loss, and resting on the stretcher. The experience with the symptoms told him that his sudden illness was the second attack of an existing disease. He told Ananda that the meal was not the cause of his illness, and that Cunda was not to blame.

A patient with shock, dehydration and profuse blood loss usually feels very cold. This was the reason why he told his attendant to prepare a bed using four sheets of ifsanghati nf. According to Buddhist monastic discipline, a ifsanghati nf is a cloak, or extra piece of robe, very large, the size of a bed sheet, which the Buddha allowed monks and nuns to wear in winter.

This information reflects how cold the Buddha felt because of his loss of blood. Clinically, it is not possible for a patient who is in a state of shock with

severe abdominal pain, most likely peritonitis, pale and shivering, to be ambulatory.

The Buddha was most likely put into a lodging, where he was nursed and warmed, located in the city of Kusinara. This view is also confirmed with the description of Ananda who, weeping, swoons and holds onto the door of his lodge after learning that the Buddha was about to pass away.

Normally, a patient with mesenteric infarction could live 10 to 20 hours. From the sutta we learn that the Buddha died about 15 to 18 hours after the attack. During that time, his attendants would have tried their best to comfort him, for example, by warming the room where he was resting, or by dripping some water into his mouth to quench his lingering thirst, or by giving him some herbal drinks. But it would be highly unlikely that a shivering patient would need someone to fan him as is described in the sutta.

Off and on, he may have recovered from a state of exhaustion, allowing him to continue his dialogues with a few people. Most of his last words could have been true, and they were memorised by generations of monks until they were transcribed. But finally, late into the night, the Buddha died during a second wave

of septic shock. His illness stemmed from natural causes coupled with his age, just as it would for anyone else.

Conclusion

The hypothesis outlined above explains several scenes in the narrative of the sutta, namely, the pressuring of Ananda to fetch water, the Buddha's request for a fourfold cloak for his bed, the ordering of the meal to be buried, and so on.



It also reveals another possibility of the actual means of transportation of the Buddha to Kusinara and the site of his death bed. Sukaramaddava, whatever its nature, was unlikely to have been the direct cause of his illness. The Buddha did not die by food poisoning. Rather, it was the size of the meal, relatively too large for his already troubled digestive tract, that triggered the second attack of mesenteric infarction that brought an end to his life.

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